SPECIAL TIME EDITION

STAR WARS

The Inside Stories. The Epic Journey. And What Comes Next.

PLUS
The Mandalorian and Grogu

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THE INSIDE STORIES. THE EPIC JOURNEY. AND WHAT COMES NEXT.

CONTENTS

4 The Force Is Strong

8 The Entire Saga

28 Dressing the Parts

32 On Politics, Religion, Feminism and Diversity

40 George Lucas's Bloodwork

50 The Mandalorian's New Mission

62 TIME Goes to the Movies

- **64** *A New Hope*
- **68** *The Empire Strikes Back*
- **70** *Return of the Jedi*
- **72** *The Phantom Menace*
- **73** *Attack of the Clones*
- **74** *Revenge of the Sith*
- **75** *The Force Awakens*
- **76** *Rogue One*
- **77** *The Last Jedi*
- **78** *Solo*
- **79** *The Rise of Skywalker*

80 Star Wars on the Small Screen

86 What's Next

88 40 Greatest Moments

94 Quiz: How Well Know Star Wars, Do You?

96 Last Word

Parts of this edition were previously published by TIME.

Familiar faces in new places: Star Wars is back, with *The Mandalorian and Grogu.*

THE FORCE IS STRONG

BY MATT VELLA

Why does Star Wars have such an unshakable hold on us? And why does a handful of fictional stories about the goings-on in a galaxy far, far away have such a sustained and profound effect on everything from how people interact with their favorite fantasies on a day-to-day basis to how Hollywood makes its profits? The book you now hold in your hands aims to answer these Death Star–size questions by charting how the long-running series changed the movies—for everybody who makes them and all of us who watch them—as well as how its fictions managed to permeate beyond celluloid into the real world.

You can glimpse the beginnings of an answer in the seeming straightforwardness of the plot of the first film, *A New Hope*, which hit a surprisingly small number of theaters on May 25, 1977. Its simplicity borders on basic: a young hero of uncertain origins ventures from the everyday world into one governed by fabulous forces that must be understood to be overcome. When he returns, he has the power to vastly improve the life of his community. (Okay, to be fair, the total arc takes a couple of sequels to come full circle.)

This simplicity might also be called universality. And, indeed, much has been made of the formative influence Joseph Campbell's work on what human beings seek from their myths had on Star Wars creator George Lucas. His Luke Skywalker is, like Osiris, Prometheus, Moses and Jesus before him, one of those archetypal heroes with a thousand faces. His story is the story of every individual who must reconcile himself—or herself—with the knotty questions of where he came from, what he's capable of, and what he's here to do with his life. The perils of that journey—what can happen when we give in to our anger or our sadness—are all there too.

Star Wars is also one of those rare works of imaginative curation that manages to create its own canon. From the geopolitical context of the Cold War, the struggle between the evil Galactic Empire and the scrappy Rebels. From the combat films of the Second World War, its breathtaking aerial and space sequences. From the Buddhist and Zen masters, the concepts of the Force and the Way of the Jedi. From the samurai, the lightsaber. And from the camp of *Flash Gordon*, the now iconic opening crawl.

Which isn't to say that Star Wars hasn't innovated. From its special effects to its deployment of sequels, the impact of Lucas's

In 1980, TIME put Darth Vader on its cover in what was then the magazine's signature portraiture style.

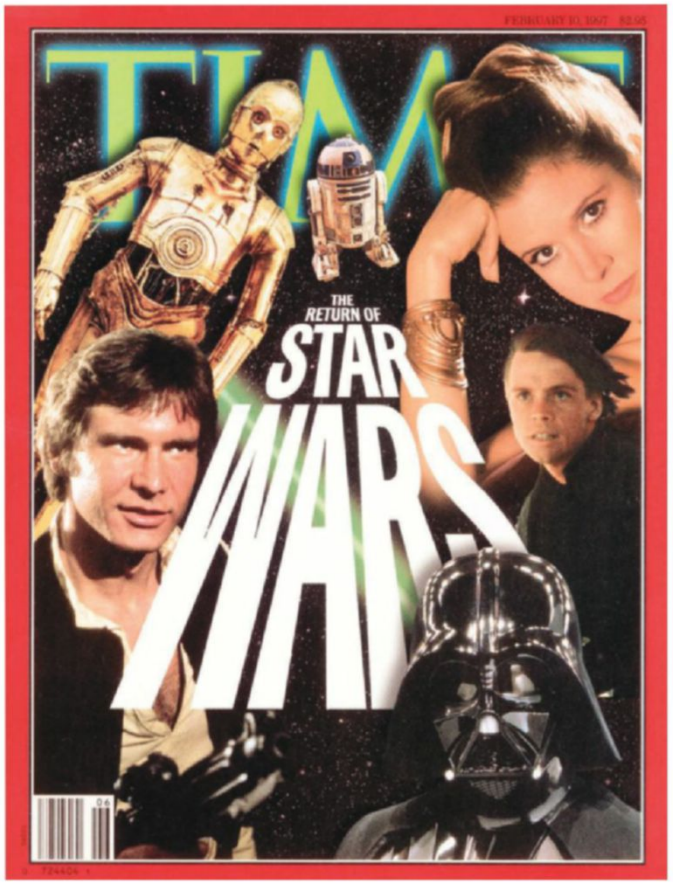
franchise on Hollywood is hard to comprehensively qualify (though we've tried mightily in the pages that follow). Perhaps most important of all, Lucas gave us a vision of the future that's easier to comprehend, disquieting as its various subplots may sometimes be. His concept of the distant future isn't of a place that technology and human reason have rendered utopia. It is novel in its honesty, in showing us a lived-in place where technology frequently fails. His concept of the cosmos, as a vast bazaar of ever stranger and more wondrous creatures, equally so. It is telling that since his series first appeared, Lucas has maintained that *Star Wars* is not a work of science fiction but a work of fantasy. Fantasy built of materials we all can relate to.

As a newsmagazine charged with marking major milestones in a world with a surplus of war, scandal, political upheaval, natural disasters and sundry other news-making events, TIME doesn't often put entertainment on its cover. Yet over the course of a 103-year-long history, Star Wars has been the subject of seven TIME magazine covers, more than any other entertainment franchise by a long shot. That is a measure in itself of the importance and legacy of these films.

In this special edition, you'll find reviews of each of the major Star Wars films, telling you not only how good they were (a matter of some debate during the 2000s) but also why they were so popular upon release. There are also stories about the series's influence on political speech, merchandising, fan conventions and much more. In an excerpt from Brian Jay Jones's biography *George Lucas: A Life*, you will find the agony the young writer-director put himself through to bring his vision to life. And several other pieces take you inside the making of various entries, including the latest, *The Mandalorian and Grogu*.

And—should you have forgotten or (gasp!) never seen the films—we begin with an easy-to-grasp primer on everything that's happened story-wise over the past half century. Yoda would, we trust, have forgiven our doing so in correct order . . .

Chronologically from top: Lucas as impresario, 1983; the franchise comes back to theaters, 1997; a new generation of Jedi, 1999; Yoda hits back, 2002; a dark star is born, 2005; and Disney's first Star Wars entry, 2015.


TIME
THE RETURN OF STAR WARS

TIME
Star Wars
The complete guide to The Phantom Menace
GEORGE LUCAS talks to Bill Moyers about the spiritual side of the Force
EXCLUSIVE PICTURES from the movie

MAY 9, 2005
www.time.com AOL Keyword: TIME
TIME
THE LAST STAR WARS
WE'VE SEEN IT! Darker, scarier, better
Q&A: George Lucas reveals all
PLUS: The Star Wars family tree

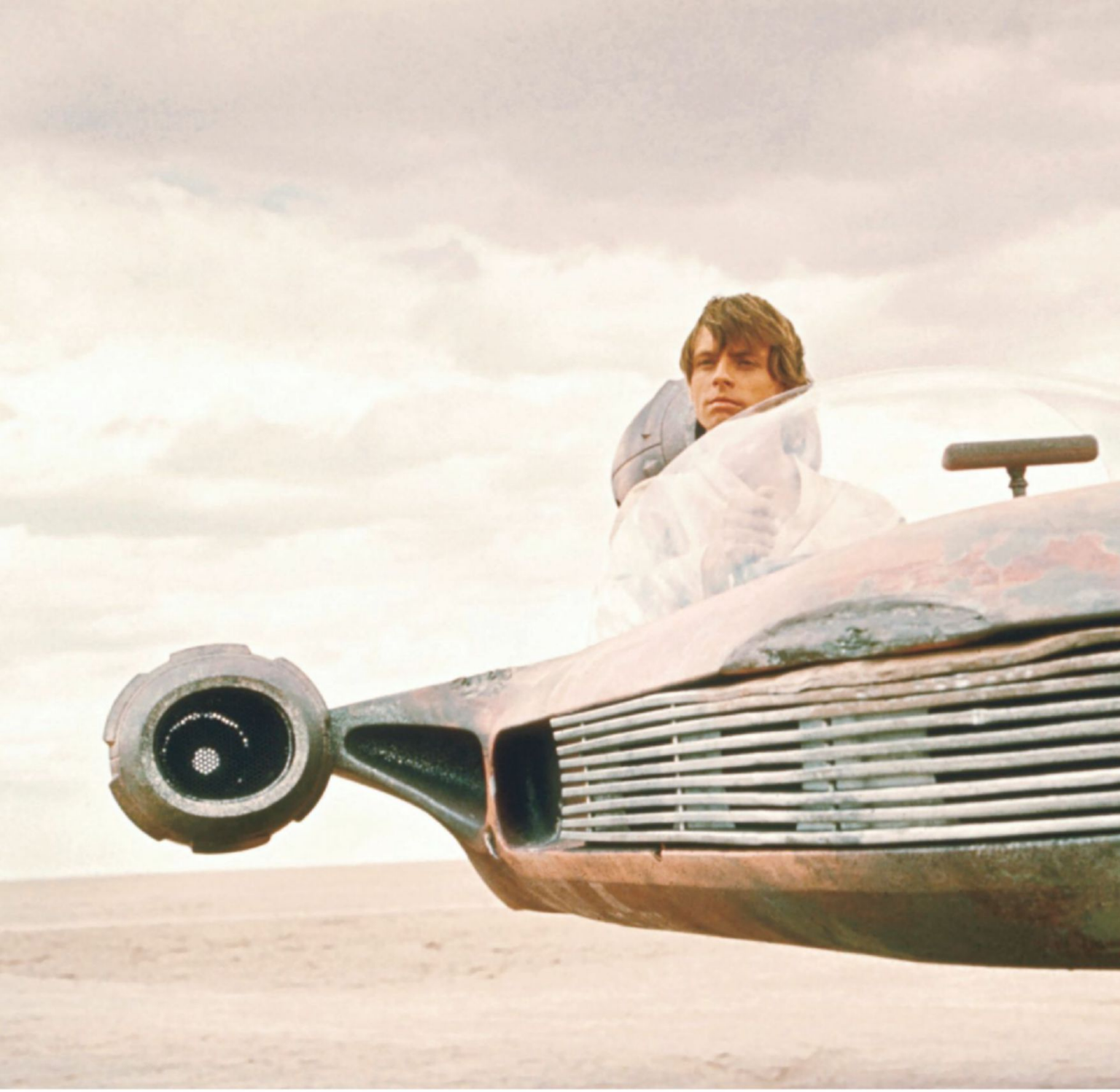
TIME
The Genius of Star Wars
By Lev Grossman

THE ENTIRE SAGA: ALL THE DETAILS, EVERY FILM

Don't quite remember *Episode V*? Missed some of the 2000s-era prequels? No matter. On the pages that follow, you'll find a reference for the stories of the long-running series in the order they came out. Plus, more than a few easter eggs

BY COURTNEY MIFSUD INTREGLIA

In *The Rise of Skywalker*, Rey practices with a training droid, just like Luke Skywalker does in *A New Hope*.



Clockwise from top: Mark Hamill as Luke in his hot-rod-like speeder; draft sketches of Stormtroopers; director George Lucas inspects a m l of the D h Star; Peter Mayhew, as Chewbacca, being coiffed.

IV

1977

A NEW HOPE

Nearly 20 years after the Galactic Empire came to power, the galaxy is plunged into civil war. After the **Rebel Alliance** obtains plans critical to the destruction of the Empire's massive secret weapon, **Sith Lord Darth Vader** captures **Princess Leia**, a Rebel leader. Two droids, C-3PO and R2-D2, escape the Empire with the plans and a message to the exiled Obi-Wan Kenobi. The old Jedi trains the young **Luke Skywalker** and brings along smuggler **Han Solo** and his copilot, the Wookiee Chewbacca, to rescue the princess.

HEROES

Luke Skywalker
Princess Leia
Han Solo
Obi-Wan Kenobi

VILLAINS

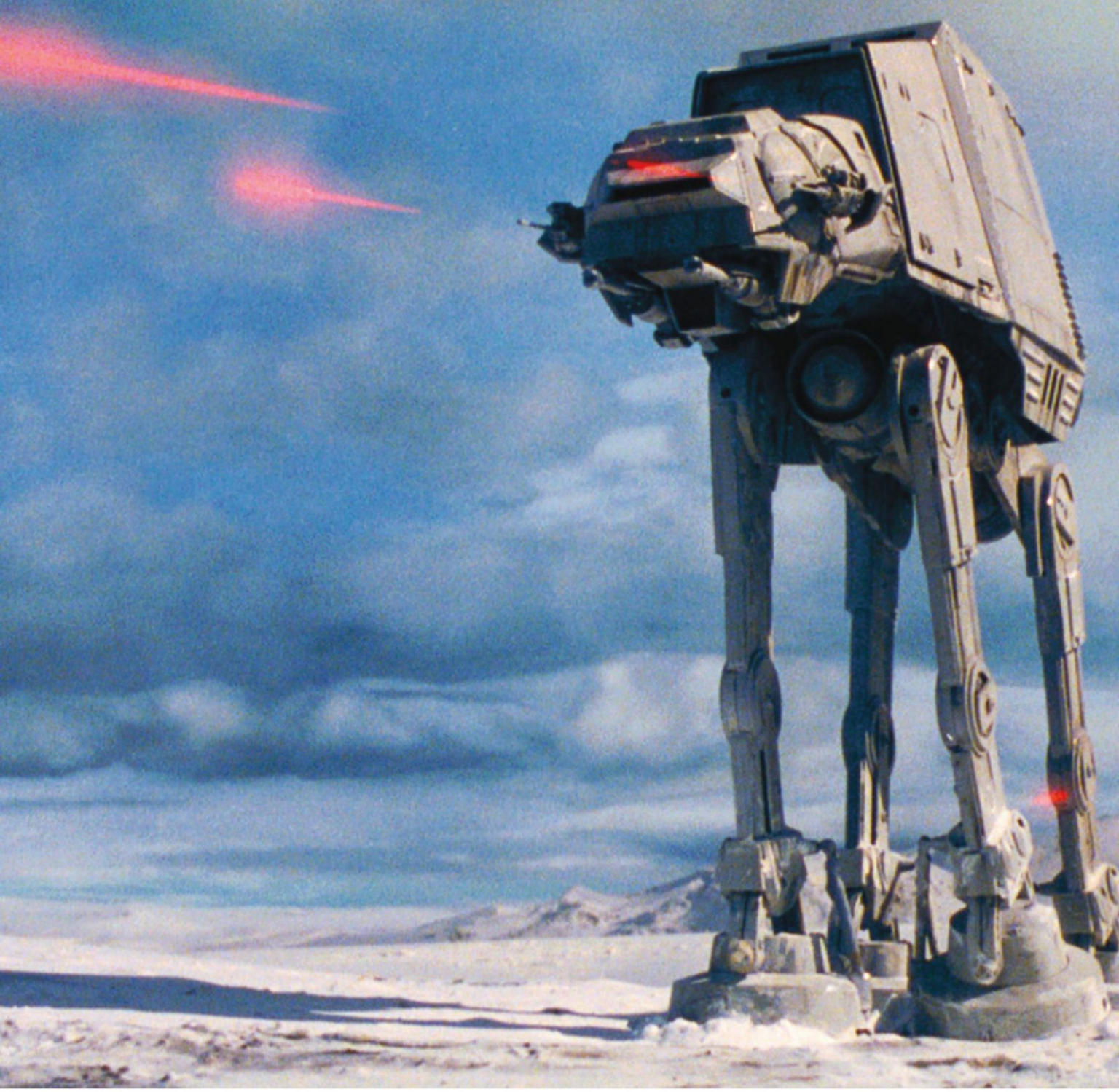
Darth Vader
Grand Moff Tarkin

WHO SHOT FIRST?

In the original 1977 release, Han Solo, the rebellious smuggler, shoots Greedo under the table. Han was the only one to fire. But in the **1997 Special Edition,** a scene was inserted to depict the alien firing first, and missing, before Han responds. In the 2004 DVD release, the scene changed again to show the two firing simultaneously. The edits have been referred to by the declaration **"Han Shot First,"** with critics claiming the revisions dilute Han's roguish character. In 2012, Lucas said the original close-up filming was misleading and that the intention was to make it clear that Greedo did shoot first all along.

THE DROID WHO ALMOST WAS

"Come on, Red, let's go!" Luke Skywalker calls to **R5-D4**, the red astromech droid originally picked by Luke's uncle to help on their farm. But the droid malfunctions. So the two farmers buy R2-D2, launching the rest of the saga. R5-D4 still drew a real-life following. A Sideshow Collectible figurine retails for $140.



Clockwise from top: Imperial AT-AT Walkers were modeled on the war elephants of Carthage; director Irvin Kershner on set with Hamill and R2-D2; a show of strength by Mayhew; Lucas (second from right) with his *Empire* collaborators, from left, Kershner, producer Gary Kurtz and co-writer Lawrence Kasdan.

V

1980

THE EMPIRE STRIKES BACK

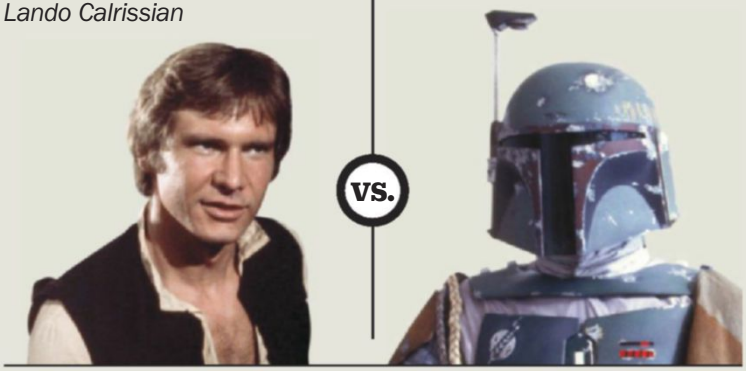
After the destruction of the **Death Star**, the Empire retaliates by launching an attack on a Rebel base. The team of heroes barely escapes, and Luke Skywalker and R2-D2 part ways with the group so that Luke can continue his Jedi training under the mysterious master **Yoda**. When the young Jedi travels to Cloud City to rescue his friends from **Darth Vader**, Luke is faced with the horrific truth about his past.

HEROES

Luke Skywalker
Princess Leia
Han Solo
Lando Calrissian

VILLAINS

Darth Vader
Boba Fett
Lando Calrissian



TAUNTAUN CALLS

The sounds of the Tauntauns, the furry creatures ridden on Hoth, were created by manipulating the calls of an **Asian sea otter named Moda**.

FATHER OF ALL TWISTS

As the duel between **Darth Vader** and **Luke Skywalker** comes to an end, the truth behind Luke's parentage ultimately is revealed. Even people who haven't seen the film are familiar with the line "Luke, I am your father." But it is one of the most misquoted lines in movie history. The Sith Lord declares, "No, I am your father," which shocked moviegoers worldwide.

Clockwise from top: *Return*'s battles are even grander in scope than those of the previous films; a modeler works on Jabba's hideous Rancor; Anthony Daniels gets into his character, C-3PO; on set for the famous speeder bike chase on the forest moon of Endor.

VI

1983

RETURN OF THE JEDI

While the Galactic Empire prepares to strike with a more powerful **Death Star**, Luke Skywalker and Princess Leia travel to Tatooine to save Han Solo from the crime lord **Jabba the Hutt**. Reunited, the band lead the Rebel Alliance in a large-scale attack against the Empire's new weapon. A realization about his family brings Luke back together with Vader and face-to-face with the sinister **Emperor Palpatine**.

HEROES

Luke Skywalker
Princess Leia
Han Solo
Anakin Skywalker

VILLAINS

Darth Vader
Emperor Palpatine
Jabba the Hutt

LUKE GOES GREEN

While Han's rescue at Jabba's palace features the return of old favorites like Luke and Leia, it also reveals a new weapon for the Jedi. At the end of *Empire*, Luke lost his father's blue lightsaber when it (and his hand) went tumbling down the abyss in Cloud City. In *Return*, Luke's new blade shines green. This is the first time viewers see a **Jedi lightsaber that's not blue**, and the hilt has a design similar to Obi-Wan's. A deleted scene included in the film's Blu-ray box set shows Luke assembling the lightsaber himself, a rite of passage for young Jedi, and activating it for the first time.

FURRY NEW FRIENDS

Small and adorable, **Ewoks** are furry warriors who aid the Rebels in their mission to disable the shield protecting the second Death Star. Originally, George Lucas intended for an army of Wookiees to help the Alliance defeat the Empire but then realized **Chewbacca** was too skilled at using technology. Instead, the more primitive—and smaller—Ewoks were developed to help save the day.

I

1999

THE PHANTOM MENACE

As tense trade disputes lead to the invasion of the **planet Naboo** by the Trade Federation, two Jedi knights, **Obi-Wan Kenobi** and **Qui-Gon Jinn**, are forced to escape with young **Queen Amidala** to Tatooine. There the group meet a young slave, Anakin Skywalker, who might be the **Chosen One** prophesied to one day restore balance to the Force.

HEROES

Qui-Gon Jinn
Obi-Wan Kenobi
Anakin Skywalker
Queen Amidala

VILLAINS

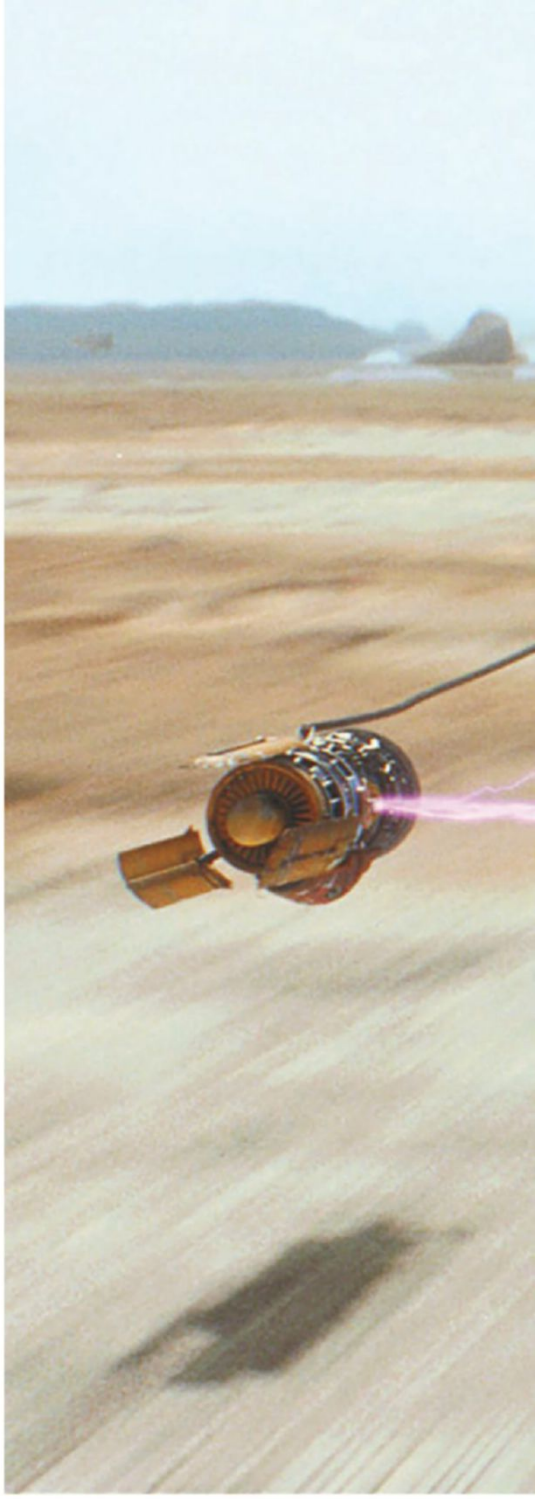
Darth Maul
Nute Gunray
Sebulba

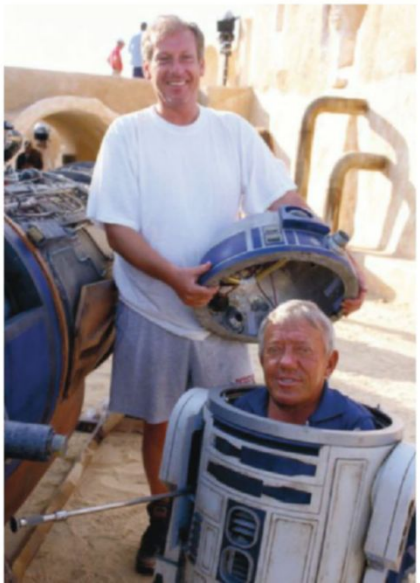
IS THAT KEIRA KNIGHTLEY?

Because of her close resemblance to **Natalie Portman**, a 12-year-old Knightley plays one of Queen Amidala's decoys, named **Sabé**, in *The Phantom Menace*.

DARTH MAUL LIVES

After slaying Qui-Gon Jinn, the deadly **Dathomirian Sith Lord** is cut in half through his torso in an epic battle with Obi-Wan Kenobi. Seemingly defeated, Maul's body tumbles into the planet's core. But according to the ***Clone Wars* series**—which remained canon after Disney bought the rights to the franchise—and *Solo*, Maul just barely survives, and his brother finds him on the junk planet Lotho Minor and revives him.





Clockwise from top: the extensive, and exhilarating, pod-racing scene; Portman becomes Amidala with layers of elaborate makeup and costuming; Kenny Baker returns to play (and pilot) R2-D2; Jake Lloyd plays young Anakin, who eventually becomes the terror of the galaxy.

II

2002

ATTACK OF THE CLONES

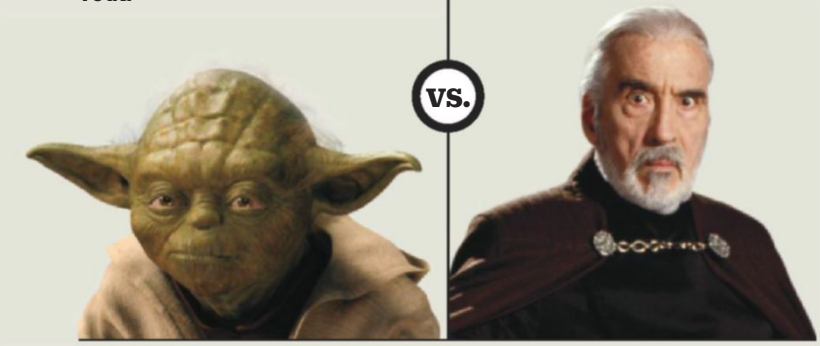
A separatist movement led by former **Jedi Count Dooku** sends the Galactic Republic to the brink of civil war. Ten years after last seeing Padmé Amidala, **Anakin Skywalker** is assigned to protect the former Queen of Naboo, now a senator. Obi-Wan Kenobi investigates her attempted assassination, leading him to discover a **clone army** waiting to be brought into the fold.

HEROES

Anakin Skywalker
Obi-Wan Kenobi
Padmé Amidala
Yoda

VILLAINS

Count Dooku
Jango Fett
Supreme Chancellor Palpatine



YODA, IMPROVED

When moviegoers first see **Yoda** in *Attack of the Clones*, he looks like a creature they've never seen before: signature green skin, thin white hair and pointed ears, but this time he's **animated**. This is the first time the franchise created an all-CGI Yoda for an entire film, as opposed to a physical puppet.

GENE EDITORS

The wispy, wide-eyed aliens from rainy Kamino were inspired by classic sci-fi. **Steven Spielberg's *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*** led to the design of the Kaminoans. Their white skin, small noses and mouths, and deep-set eyes draw on Spielberg's aliens. Lucas said, "The Kamino design was a very deliberate nod to the classic alien of *Close Encounters*."

Clockwise from top: Yoda, now a CG animation, unleashes Force lightning; a makeshift tent city as viewers line up to see the 2002 film premiere; Lucas gives direction to Daniels' C-3PO.

III

2005

REVENGE OF THE SITH

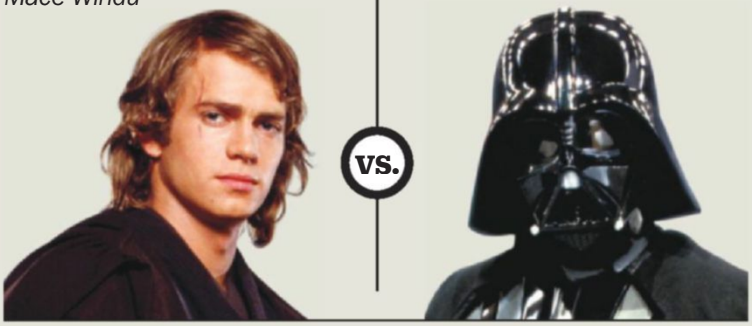
The Jedi knights lead a **clone army** into a massive battle against separatist forces. After **Anakin Skywalker** and **Obi-Wan Kenobi** rescue Supreme Chancellor Palpatine, he reveals himself to be **Darth Sidious**, manipulating both sides of the war behind the scenes. Sidious lures Anakin to the dark side, completing Skywalker's transition to **Darth Vader**.

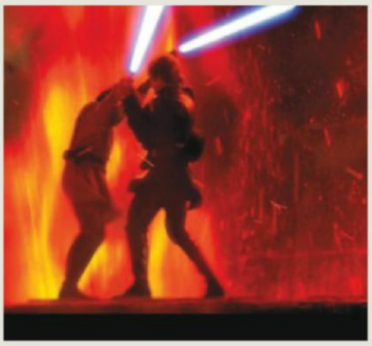
HEROES

Obi-Wan Kenobi
Yoda
Anakin Skywalker
Padmé Amidala
Mace Windu

VILLAINS

Supreme Chancellor Palpatine
General Grievous
Darth Vader





HOT FIGHT

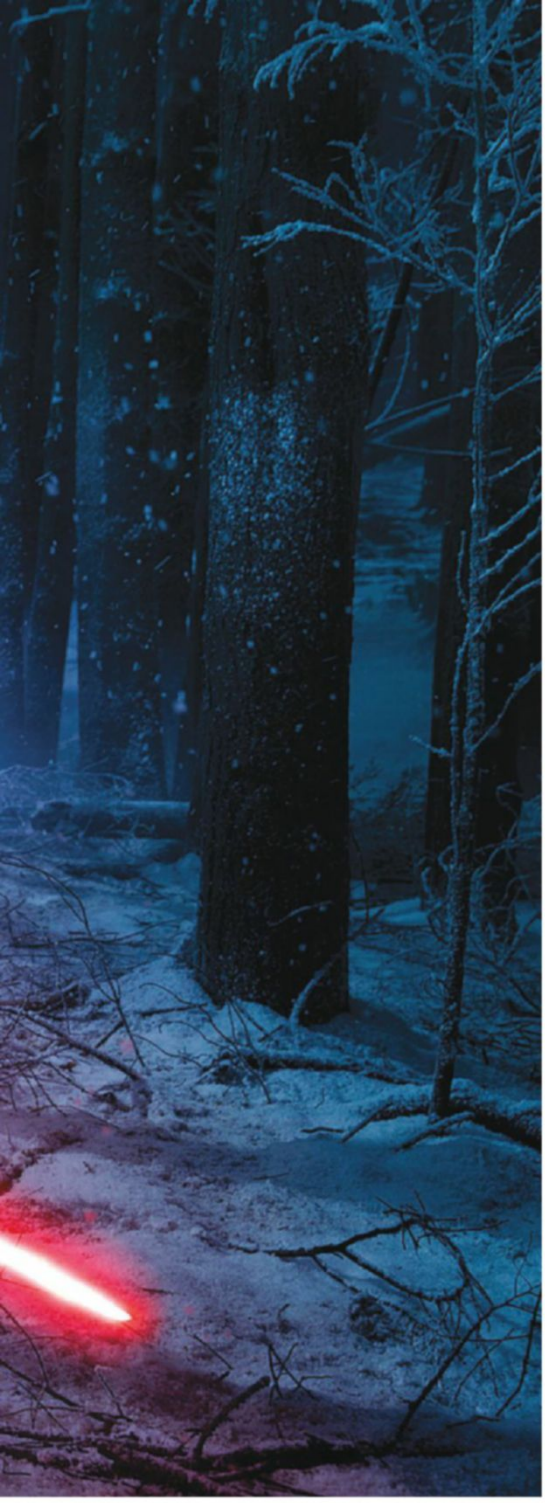
The fast-paced duel between Obi-Wan Kenobi and Anakin Skywalker at the end of the film features **real-life volcanic eruptions**. The filmmakers used footage of lava from Sicily's **Mount Etna**, Europe's largest active volcano.

REBEL YELL

An army of **Wookiees** face the clone troopers in this film, but it was all filmed with just **eight Wookiee suits**. Costume and props modeler Ivo Coveney switched up the props, armor and weapons to differentiate the Wookiees.

Clockwise from top: Anakin's defection to the dark side is completed in *Revenge*; by the end of the film, he's transformed into Darth Vader; cast and crew members with Lucas (center).

Clockwise from top: Kylo Ren confronts Finn and Rey at the film's climax; Abrams directs Daisy Ridley as Rey during her early scenes as a scrappy scavenger; Leia, now a general, discusses strategy with Rey; Abrams (right) directs Ford, who returns as Han Solo.



VII

2015

THE FORCE AWAKENS

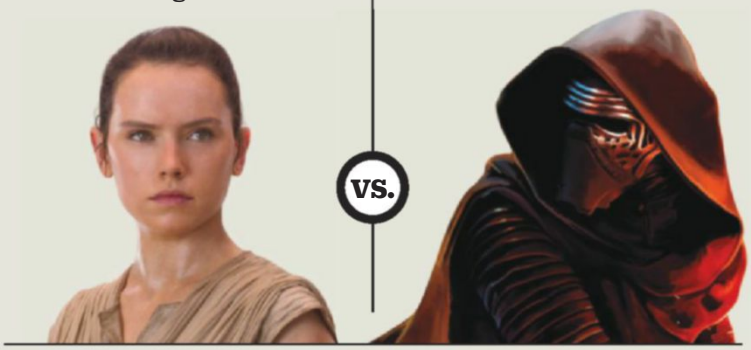
Thirty years after the Rebel Alliance took down the **Empire's second Death Star**, the First Order, led by **Kylo Ren**, rises out of the ashes with its own superweapon, **Starkiller Base**. With General Leia Organa leading the Resistance in its search for the missing Luke Skywalker, Han Solo brings two young heroes—**Rey**, a scavenger from Jakku, and **Finn**, a former Stormtrooper—into the fight.

HEROES

Rey
Finn
Han Solo
General Leia Organa

VILLAINS

Kylo Ren
Captain Phasma
General Hux



THE MAN I WAS

When Rey and Finn meet Han Solo, they ask if he's really him. He replies, **"I used to be."** It's not the first time Harrison Ford has delivered the line. At 2015's San Diego Comic-Con, John Boyega (Finn) shared his favorite memory of Ford meeting a fan. At a restaurant in southeast London, a Nigerian man asked the actor, "Are you Harrison Ford?" and Ford responded, "I used to be."

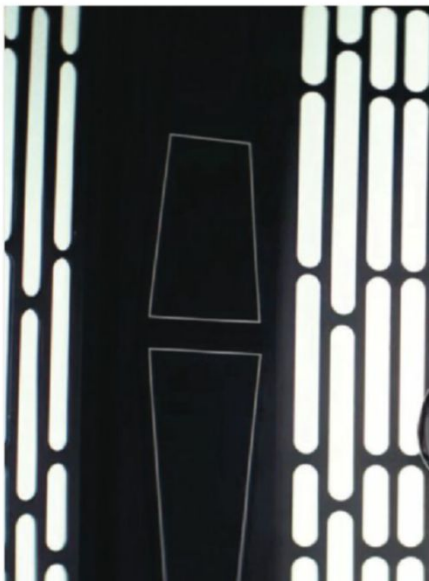
HARDWARE UPGRADE

Last time viewers saw the ***Millennium Falcon***, Lando Calrissian had knocked off its circular radar dish during the assault on the second Death Star, in *Return of the Jedi*. In *The Force Awakens*, there's a rectangular radar dish in its place, opposite the ship's cockpit.

THE REAL DEAL

Director J.J. Abrams wanted to use as many real-world props as possible to capture the feel of the original films. Instead of a CG character, **BB-8** was a genuine, functioning robot that rolled around on a uni-ball.

Clockwise from top: Rey meets Luke, who has exiled himself on Ahch-To; Kylo Ren reflects on his path to the dark side; First Order Stormtrooper defector Finn battles it out with his old leader, Captain Phasma, as he tries to escape a First Order ship with Rose.



VIII

2017

THE LAST JEDI

Luke Skywalker's peaceful solitude gets interrupted when Rey asks for his guidance so she can learn the ways of the Force. Meanwhile, following the Battle of Starkiller Base, General Leia Organa leads Resistance forces fleeing a First Order fleet. As the Resistance struggles to stay ahead, Resistance pilot Poe Dameron helps Finn, **BB-8** and mechanic Rose Tico embark on a secret mission to disable the First Order's tracking device.

HEROES

General Leia Organa
Vice Admiral Amilyn Holdo
Luke Skywalker

VILLAINS

General Hux
Captain Phasma
Supreme Leader Snoke

GOT MILK?

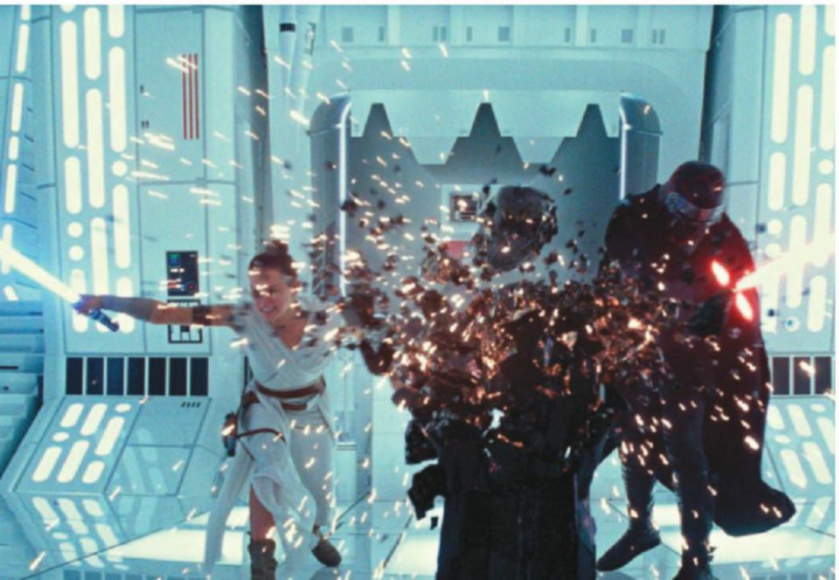
In 1977, CGI special effects were nowhere near today's. George Lucas had to find creative ways to make the alien world seem convincing to viewers. In *A New Hope*, Luke sits down for a meal with his adoptive parents and he pours himself a cup of an out-of-this-world-looking blue milk. As an homage to that moment in the original *Star Wars* film, Luke **harvests green milk** from one of the aliens of Ahch-To, much to Rey's disgust.

PORG MANIA

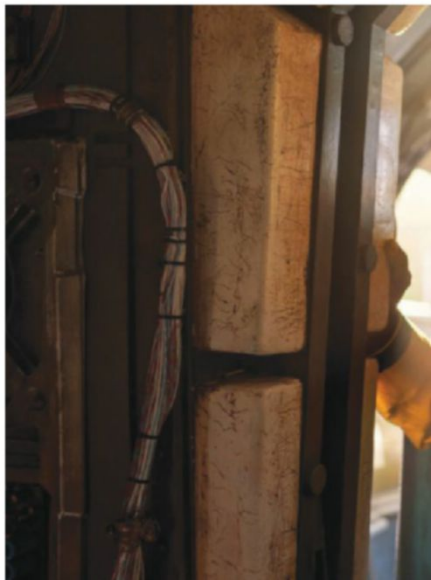
Native to the planet Ahch-To, where Jedi Master–in–hiding Luke has exiled himself, the cliff-dwelling **porgs** look like a cross between a hamster and a penguin, with giant, Disney-creature eyes. Director Rian Johnson dreamed up the creatures after observing **a group of puffins** in Ireland.

GENERAL ORGANA

Many wondered how **Carrie Fisher**'s role in *The Last Jedi* would change as a result of her death in 2016. Filmmakers have confirmed that none of Fisher's scenes or dialogue were altered in any way in relation to her passing.



Clockwise from top: The Resistance prepares to face off against the First Order in a final battle; Billy Dee Williams returns as fan favorite Lando Calrissian; through their strengthening Force bond, Kylo Ren and Rey clash.



IX

2019

THE RISE OF SKYWALKER

When it is discovered that Emperor Palpatine did not die at the hands of Darth Vader decades earlier, Rey, Finn, Poe, Chewbacca, BB-8 and C-3PO depart in the *Millennium Falcon* and race across the galaxy to track down Palpatine before Kylo Ren can stop them. After Ren reveals the true nature of Rey's parentage to her through their Force connection, they face off.

HEROES

Rey Skywalker
Finn
Kylo Ren

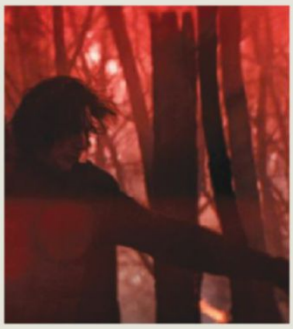
VILLAINS

General Pryde
Darth Sidious/
Emperor Palpatine

VS.

LET THE WOOKIEE WIN

Chewbacca, Finn and Poe are seen playing a familiar game of **Dejarik** on the *Millennium Falcon*. The holographic chess-like game was first introduced in *A New Hope,* and C-3PO warns R2 to let Chewbacca win. This time, Poe and Finn realize the Wookiee is cheating.



LAVA PLANET

Although it is not stated in the film (it was confirmed in the visual dictionary released as a companion to the sequel), Kylo Ren found the Sith wayfinder on the planet **Mustafar**. The lava planet was introduced in *Revenge of the Sith,* and it is where Anakin Skywalker fully becomes Darth Vader.

WEDGE SURVIVES

Denis Lawson reprised his role as pilot **Wedge Antilles** from *A New Hope* to aid the Resistance in the final battle. Wedge is one of the few supporting characters from the original trilogy.

DRESSING THE PARTS: HOW TRUE FANS TAKE THEIR LOVE OF STAR WARS TO THE NEXT LEVEL

BY MEGAN MCCLUSKEY

Forty-nine years ago, *Star Wars* opened in a mere 43 theaters across America. TIME declared it "The Year's Best Movie" five months into 1977 in a review that seemed to anticipate its future as a pop-culture staple: "A universe of plenty—as audiences can discover beginning this week in *Star Wars*, a grand and glorious film that may well be the smash hit of 1977, and certainly is the best movie of the year so far" (See original review, page 64.) The rest is a string of shattered box office records . . . and movie history.

However, the box office isn't the only place *Star Wars* has made its mark. The epic's sprawling cast of exotic aliens, talkative droids and complex humans has inspired legions of fans to try their hand at becoming one of them. Since the inception of the series, enthusiasts have celebrated their love of creator George Lucas's fictional universe by cloaking themselves in its garb. Literally.

Cosplay—a portmanteau of the words "costume" and "play"—is a hobby in which participants dress up to represent a specific characters. In recent decades, the practice has become increasingly mainstream. Annual

Clockwise from top left: familiar faces in Anaheim, 2015; Leias in Orlando, 2010; innovation in San Diego, 2014; Stormtroopers in San Diego, 2016; Caleb Olander, 5, with a lightsaber, in Washington, D.C., 2013.

True Believers

When Star Wars is a lifestyle

"The Land of the Free," an ongoing photography project by Steve Schofield, shows English fans of American pop culture in costume at home. Clockwise from top left, in 2010: two Darth Vaders; a Chewbacca, who says he sometimes dresses as Han Solo; a Princess Leia disguised as bounty hunter Boushh; a contemplative Jedi warrior; a handsome Han Solo; and a Rebel fighter pilot.

fan conventions such as Comic-Con and Star Wars Celebration now draw thousands who arrive dressed in character, from gold Princess Leia bikinis to sculpted Stormtrooper uniforms and sweeping Jedi robes.

For some people, costumes are a passkey into a world that otherwise exists solely onscreen. Take the 501st Legion, for example. The fan-run organization became internationally known for its authentic reproductions of Imperial Stormtrooper gear. The group was founded in 1997 for "the express purpose of bringing together costume enthusiasts under a collective identity within which to operate." And with more than 14,000 active members in more than 60 countries, it's clear the Legion—along with other similar associations—taps into an appeal that transcends cultural boundaries.

Director Francis Ford Coppola, Lucas's longtime filmmaking friend, once told him he should start his own religion. Lucas, obviously, decided to stick to telling his kind of stories. But the apparent reasoning behind Coppola's suggestion gets down to the root of cosplay fever: a zealous devotion in fans that, in some ways, is tantamount to faith.

The most fervent among them spend copious amounts of time (and money) painstakingly crafting costumes and personas to fully immerse themselves in the identities of Lucas's characters. Due to the nature of most fan conventions, the opportunity to play their chosen parts lasts for just a few days at the most. But it renders an experience that continues to draw in both new and returning participants.

"It's not a film about the future," Lucas told TIME in 1977. "*Star Wars* is a fantasy." This classification implies that the story of *Star Wars* can exist only in a distant, inaccessible reality. Convention-goers and cosplaying fans know otherwise.

STAR WARS IN OUR WORLD

AS THE SERIES GREW MORE POPULAR, IT HAD A CULTURAL IMPACT FAR BEYOND FILM

President Ronald Reagan's missile defense program came to be called "Star Wars."

POLITICS

Lucas's films changed how we talk about national affairs

BY RYAN TEAGUE BECKWITH

When George Lucas sat down in early 1973 to draft an operatic science-fiction movie about a ragtag group of rebels fighting a corrupt central government, the trial of the Watergate burglars had just begun. He wrote *Star Wars* reflecting the fraught politics of that moment, hoping to serve a tidy political lesson along with the popcorn. "It was really about the Vietnam War, and that was the period where Nixon was trying to run for a [second] term, which got me to thinking historically about how do democracies get turned into dictatorships?" he told the *Chicago Tribune* years later. "Because the democracies

aren't overthrown; they're given away."

Like all art, movies have a way of escaping their creators' intentions. As *Star Wars* and its sequels broke box office records, they became so popular that their characters, plot devices and lingo became a kind of cultural shorthand. Politicians and activists used them to make their arguments—sometimes for ideas that Lucas disagreed with. And in the final blow, the movie's bad guys were embraced by the very types the writer-director was warning against. In a way, *Star Wars* was the first political meme of the modern era, an analog example of the cultural churn the internet now produces daily.

The political history of *Star Wars* began hopefully enough with President Jimmy Carter—like Luke Skywalker, a farm boy who went on to bigger things—watching *A New Hope* at Camp David in 1978 with Egyptian president Anwar Sadat as they held a secret strategy session for the historic Camp David Accords. But the real breakthrough came in 1983, the same year as the release of *Return of the Jedi*. President Ronald Reagan had been lobbing rhetorical attacks at the Soviet Union throughout his first term, but he'd faced pushback from establishment-oriented foreign-policy types. Administration officials wanted a harsher tone and added language to a presidential speech that ended up defining Reagan's combative approach to the U.S.S.R. He implored the world not to misjudge "the aggressive impulses of an evil empire."

Speechwriter Anthony R. Dolan later denied that the term "evil empire" was inspired by the Galactic Empire in *Star Wars*, but the image stuck in large part because of that resonance. The Soviets decried the "Evil Empire speech," as it came to be known, and Reagan himself walked the phrase back in a 1988 meeting with Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev, arguing that it came "from another time, another era."

But the association was hard to shake, especially since Reagan was a former actor who was known to be influenced by movies. When he gave a second speech a few weeks later calling for a space-based missile defense system, critics dubbed the proposed technology "Star Wars." That name stuck too.

From the 1980s on, the Congressional Record is littered with references to Skywalkers and Yodas, Death Stars and Darth Vaders. Quotes from the movie series are repeated and garbled. (President Barack Obama famously mangled the "Jedi mind trick.") During the George W. Bush administration, Vice President Dick Cheney was called Darth Vader by critics so often that he embraced the nickname, dressing up his black Lab in a Vader costume for Halloween in 2007 and joking that it was "one of the nicer things I've been called recently." Eventually, he began using "The Imperial March"—Vader's instantly recognizable theme—as his walk-up music at political appearances.

Somewhere, George Lucas surely winced. He made clear in 2009 that he viewed Cheney not as Darth Vader—"a promising young man who is turned to the dark side by an older politician"—but rather as that older politician, Emperor Palpatine. As for the White House's current occupant, well, it's hard to guess what Lucas would have to say. But it's certainly fun to try anyway.

That's the thing about art. As a director, you can have an idea for what a movie is supposed to mean, and how people should respond to it politically. But all you can do is put it out there. After that, the audience does what it wants.

RELIGION

The many parallels between a movie fiction and historical reality

BY COURTNEY MIFSUD INTREGLIA

Not so long ago, "Jediism" ranked as one of Britain's biggest religions. In a 2001 census, more than 390,000 people identified themselves as "Jedi" when asked about their faith—after a call to protest the inclusion of the religious question on the census. The fictional faith came in behind only Christianity, Islam and Hinduism. Although the devotees may have cast their votes in protest or as a joke, groups

The Initiate

Luke Skywalker

Mark Hamill's Luke is unfamiliar with the ways of the Jedi. His education in the film is a way of guiding viewers through the ways of the Force, too.

like the Temple of the Jedi Order tout themselves as "Jedi followers, ministers and leaders [who] embrace Jediism as a real living, breathing religion." Although the Order was denied recognition as an official religion by the Charity Commission in 2016, it regularly puts out doctrine inspired by the film franchise's Jedi Code.

This may make more sense than it seems: *Star Wars*'s fictional religion found its bearings in historic faiths. In *A New Hope*, Obi-Wan Kenobi explains the Force, the organizing principle in the *Star Wars* universe, to Luke as "an energy field created by all living things. It surrounds us, penetrates us, and binds the galaxy together." Disciples like the Jedi knights use it to guide decisions and physically manifest powers. Sith Lords channel the darker elements of the Force, like anger and ambition, in their practice.

The fictional energy has parallels with genuine religions. Christian moviegoers might find similarities between the Force and the Holy Spirit, the bodiless presence of God in believers' faith experience. In Islam, Allah has no shape or image and is an entity that breathes its spirit into all living things. Just as the light side and dark side of the Force stem from the same power, Judaism teaches that corresponding forces come from a single source, or as the Hebrew Bible puts it, "Who forms light and creates darkness, Who makes peace and creates evil."

"When I wrote the first *Star Wars*, I had to come up with a whole cosmology: What do people believe in?"

In an interview with TIME in 1999, Lucas discussed utilizing existing religion and myths in crafting his worlds. "When I wrote the first *Star Wars*, I had to come up with a whole cosmology: What do people believe in? I had to do something that was relevant, something that imitated a belief system that has been around for thousands of years, and that most people on the planet, one way or another, have some kind of connection to."

Star Wars also draws a direct parallel between its leading heroes and Jesus Christ. Throughout the prequels, Anakin Skywalker is often referred to as the "Chosen One," the savior in an ancient Jedi prophecy. In *The Phantom Menace*, Qui-Gon learns that Anakin, the young slave boy on Tatooine, doesn't have a father. The child has a mother but was born immaculately of the Force. In Christianity, Jesus Christ is born of the Virgin Mary and, although raised by her and her husband, Joseph, has no biological father. By presenting this parallel between Anakin's origins and Christ's, Lucas foretold Skywalker's arc—bringing balance to the world through his sacrifice in death.

Anakin is not the only Skywalker to share a narrative with the Christian prophet. After he turns to the dark side of the Force and becomes Darth Vader, he comes face to face with his son, the saga's new savior. In *The Empire Strikes Back*, Vader attempts to lure Luke over to the Empire by offering him power, saying, "Join me, and together, we can rule the galaxy as father and son! Come with me. It is the only way." This interaction brings to mind the episode in the Bible in which the Devil takes Jesus to a tall mountain and offers him all the kingdoms of the world. When asked if Christ's story influenced his narrative, Lucas replied, "Yes. That story also has been retold. Buddha was tempted in the same way. It's all through mythology."

By telling the story of these characters through familiar idioms, Lucas set out to do more than make a thrilling action movie. He trained a modern lens on ancient religious motifs. But he didn't set out to preach: "I don't see *Star Wars* as profoundly religious. I see *Star Wars* as taking all the issues that religion represents and trying to distill them down into a more modern and easily accessible construct—that there is a greater mystery out there." He continued: "I remember when I was 10 years old, I asked my mother, 'If there's only one God, why are there so many religions?' I've been pondering that question ever since, and the conclusion I've come to is that all the religions are true."

FEMINISM

Carrie Fisher played the first truly kickass princess

BY ELIANA DOCKTERMAN

There were princesses before Leia, of course. Written by the likes of Hans Christian Andersen and the Brothers Grimm and later rewritten by Disney, most were the kind of princesses who cleaned or idled or napped until a prince showed up to save them. But Carrie Fisher's Leia Organa was the first princess in pop culture to take matters into her own hands, to boss up, to tell the male heroes what to do and, literally, to save the galaxy. For that she became iconic, the first kickass princess.

Leia took the stage, like the princesses that preceded her, as a damsel in distress. In 1977's *A New Hope*, Darth Vader kidnaps her, and she must await a rescue mission led by a lovestruck Luke Skywalker and a reluctant Han Solo. As it usually goes in the movies, she falls for one of her rescuers (Han, the rapscallion, not Luke, secretly her twin). But she is soon ordering them around—down the garbage shoot, through space, toward danger and glory.

As the series continues, Leia gets her hands on a blaster and fires it as well as anybody else. She leads troops on Hoth, like Washington across the Delaware. She proves to be a talented welder, patching up Rebel starships in her downtime. Her outfits—with one ignominious, gilded exception—render her not so much a sex object as an action hero. Her flowy robes and unisex battle-ready gear are more realistic than the leather and spandex of Black Widow or the quasi bathing suit of Wonder Woman.

The character has flaws, and Fisher was the first to admit them. "The only way they knew to make the character strong was to make her angry," she said in an interview with *Rolling Stone* shortly before *Return of the Jedi* premiered in 1983. "In *Return of the Jedi*, she gets to be more feminine, more supportive, more affectionate. But let's not forget that these movies are basically boys' fantasies. So the other way they made her more female in this one was to have her take off her clothes."

Fisher was, of course, referring to the infamous scene in which the lugubrious slug gangster Jabba the Hutt chains Leia up and dresses her in a gold bikini. The outfit has since taken on a life of its own—*Friends*, *The Big Bang Theory*, *Family Guy* and even Amy Schumer have lampooned the costume. For some, the scene undermines the whole notion of Leia as a feminist icon. Fisher spoke frankly about hating the bikini and even trying to ad-lib some snark into the scene: In rehearsals, she called after Harrison Ford and Mark Hamill, "Don't worry about me! I'll be fine! Seriously!" after their two characters speak to Jabba but ignore her during their thwarted rescue. Ahead of filming *The Force Awakens*, she advised actress Daisy Ridley not to let her character be subjected to similar objectification.

Carrie Fisher's Leia Organa was the first princess in pop culture to take matters into her own hands.

But Fisher played Leia as an undeniable force and refused to let the character's legacy be tarnished by one costume. Leia, it's worth remembering, murders Jabba by choking him with the very chains that were supposed to keep her submissive. As she does so, the glee shows on Fisher's face.

By playing Leia the way she did and by speaking openly about the troubled trope, Fisher upended notions of what a princess could or should be. Studios began to figure out that other types of female protagonists—especially in sci-fi, like *Alien*'s Ellen Ripley or *Terminator*'s Sarah Connor—were bankable. Disney princesses, meanwhile, slowly gained more agency, beginning with *Beauty and the Beast* and *Pocahontas* and more re-

The Icon

Princess Leia

Carrie Fisher's Leia was a new kind of princess: She didn't rely on a man to rescue her. Her influence spawned a generation of heroines.

cently in *Frozen* and *Moana*. Leia did eventually become a Disney princess when Disney acquired Lucasfilm and invited Fisher to reprise her role in the sequels. But in a sign of the progress she helped usher in, this time her character had a new title: general.

During the filming of the original trilogy, Fisher was often the lone woman on set. In *Force* and *The Last Jedi*, the galaxy is populated with both men and women. Audiences learned that women could be Jedis, Stormtroopers or mysterious aliens who offer cryptic prophesies, positions that had seemed to belong only to men in earlier installments. Ridley's Rey became the first major female character to wield a lightsaber in the series, a coup for any little girl who wanted to pretend to be a Jedi along with her brothers.

The Force Awakens explicitly upended the tropes about women in action movies that have persisted since Fisher first played Leia. The movie's male lead, Finn (John Boyega), first meets Rey when he prepares to save her from a gang of thugs, only to watch in amazement as she deftly takes them out herself. Throughout the rest of the film, Finn constantly grabs at Rey's hand when the two are in danger, offering her comfort. Rey swats it away.

A year after *The Force Awakens* premiered, a young version of Fisher was digitally resurrected for the prequel, *Rogue One*—another *Star Wars* story starring a female lead, Jyn (Felicity Jones). Like Rey, Jyn gets to play out the hero's journey traditionally reserved for men, growing from orphan to leader. If the women are saved, they, like Leia, never miss an opportunity to rescue their male saviors in turn. Some critics drew similarities between Jyn and Rey and Leia herself. But, as Jones once pointed out, cinematic history is littered with franchises full of male leads. Now we finally have one with multiple female leads, too.

Of course, Princess Leia's legacy extends beyond the *Star Wars* galaxy. Without Carrie Fisher's Leia, there may have never been Xena, Mulan or Elsa. Luckily, none of those princesses—or the many to come—have had to wait for a man to save them. They know they can save themselves.

DIVERSITY

Rewinding and rewriting the Star Wars legacy for the next generation

BY ELIANA DOCKTERMAN

Star Wars has always been populated by a wide array of aliens. But until recently, its human heroes have all looked strikingly similar. Han Solo, Luke Skywalker, Obi-Wan Kenobi, Anakin Skywalker—they are all white and male, a fact that presented a problem for Disney when it decided to reboot the series in the 2010s. Audience expectations had changed: parents now demand diverse heroes for their kids, and global box office success can make or break a movie.

The Force Awakens became the fourth-highest-grossing film of all time (worldwide) after it premiered in 2015, in part because it boasted one of the most diverse casts ever to star in a blockbuster film. It represented a galactic shift for the franchise. In retrospect, 1977's *A New Hope* lacks the racial and gender sensibilities of modern blockbusters. Women didn't wield lightsabers until the prequels in the 2000s, and even then only minor female characters had the privilege. That left the studio trying to tap into a lucrative audience longing for yesteryear while creating a different set of protagonists.

So 2016's *Rogue One*, set during the time of the earlier trilogy, returns to the original *Star Wars* era with a diverse, international cast. Among the Rebels who stow away on Empire ships and shoot their way through hordes of Stormtroopers are Bodhi Rook (British Pakistani actor Riz Ahmed), Captain Cassian Andor (Mexican actor Diego Luna), spiritual warrior Chirrut Imwe (Hong Kong actor Donnie Yen), assassin Baze Malbus (Chinese actor Jiang Wan) and Resistance fighter Saw Gerrera (African American actor Forest Whitaker).

"In Star Wars, you're not just talking about different nationalities. You're talking about

A New Class

The cast of *Rogue One*

Under Disney, Star Wars films—even those set in the timelines of the earlier trilogy—have and will likely continue to feature more diverse casts.

different species and creatures living in different galaxies," says Danish actor Mads Mikkelsen, who plays Galen Erso, an Empire scientist who purposely sneaks a flaw into the design of the Death Star. "It would be really weird if everybody just came from America." It's an admirable, and smart, mission: now kids in all countries can aspire to destroy the Death Star when they play with action figures who actually look like them.

Like *The Force Awakens* and *The Last Jedi*, which star Daisy Ridley as Rey, *Rogue One* features a female protagonist, Jyn Erso, played by Oscar-nominated Brit Felicity Jones. "It doesn't feel at all radical to have both Rey and Jyn as heroes. Think of the countless action franchises with multiple male heroes," says Jones. "We want you to identify with Jyn as a person, not to objectify her but to empathize with her."

"I think that films like *Star Wars* have the great potential to let so many different people put themselves in someone else's shoes, and there are so many different pairs to try on," says Ahmed, who has spoken out about the limited types of roles offered to actors like him. In *Rogue One*, he plays a Galactic Empire pilot who defects to the Rebel Alliance. "I made a decision not to play characters that were reinforcing stereotypes with two-dimensional portrayals. I hope the work that I've done forces the culture to change a bit."

The struggle to modernize properties with billion-dollar potential is not a new problem. Some franchises have run so long—*Star Trek*, James Bond, some superhero films—that they've been overtaken by a culture that makes even futuristic settings look dated. George Lucas created *Star Wars* in response to Nixon and the Vietnam War—a story of teenage rebellion to save democracy. In the films that have come in recent years, and those still to come, this distant galaxy may function as a metaphor for a world as diverse as ours.

George Lucas on the set of *A New Hope* with Mark Hamill (Luke Skywalker).

GEORGE LUCAS: TO WRITE HIS FILM, HE BLED ON THE PAGE

BY BRIAN JAY JONES

I don't have a natural talent for writing," George Lucas confessed to *Filmmakers Newsletter* in 1974. "When I sit down, I bleed on the page, and it's just awful. Writing just doesn't flow in a creative surge the way other things do."

No other project would make Lucas bleed more than *Star Wars*. For nearly three years, he would agonize over plots and characters, plumbing science-fiction novels, folklore, comic books and movies for inspiration. He would struggle through draft after draft, writing and rewriting, lifting scenes and subplots he liked from earlier drafts, fussing with the spellings of planets and characters, and trying to make sense of an ever-expanding script that was starting to spin out of his control. And time and time again, he would find both friends and studio executives baffled by his story, skeptical he could ever get any of it on film.

Lucas would treat the writing of *Star Wars* as a full-time job, trudging up the stairs to his

writing room each morning at 9 a.m., where he would then lower himself slowly into his wooden desk chair and stare at a blank page for hours, waiting for the words to come. "I sit at my desk for eight hours a day no matter what happens, even if I don't write anything," he explained. "It's a terrible way to live. But I do it; I sit down and I do it."

Over his desk, he hung a wall calendar to track his progress, vowing to write five pages daily and marking off each day with a big dramatic X. On a good day, he might have one page completed by 4 p.m.—then, with an eye on the clock, he would scramble to write the four remaining pages over the next hour. If he could finish his pages early, he would permit himself to knock off for the rest of the day and maybe reward himself with a bit of music from one of his most prized possessions: a glowing, garish, fully functional 1941 Wurlitzer jukebox, which Lucas had loaded with his own collection of rock-and-roll 45s. As the Diamonds' "Little Darlin'" wailed from the Wurlitzer's throbbing speakers, Lucas would kick back in his chair, tennis shoes off and shirttail untucked, lost in the music and grateful to be done for the day.

Most days, however, the jukebox would remain quiet, its neon lights dark—and no words would be written at all. At 5:30 he would tromp downstairs to watch the *Evening News with Walter Cronkite*, glaring with anger over a TV dinner as he stewed about the blank pages he'd left upstairs. "You go crazy writing," Lucas said later. "You get psychotic. You get yourself so psyched up and go in such strange directions in your mind that it's a wonder that all writers aren't put away someplace."

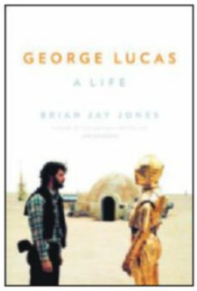
As Lucas sat down to write in his little office in Mill Valley in February 1973, all he had was the merest spark of an idea. After a skeptical King Features had declined to sell him Flash Gordon, Lucas decided he could just as easily make up his own characters. "It's your basic superhero in outer space," he explained. "I realized that what I really wanted to do was a contemporary action fantasy."

As would become his habit, Lucas began the writing process by making lists of names and locations for his fantasy, scrawling Emperor Ford Xerxes XII—a suitably heroic-sounding name—at the top of one of his notebook pages, followed by single names like Owen, Mace, Biggs and Valorum. After trying various combinations, Lucas then divided his list into names of characters and planets, giving each a brief title or description. Luke Skywalker was on the list from the very start, but he was "Prince of Bebers," while Han Solo was "leader of the Hubble people." The planets Alderaan and Yavin were there too, as were locations named after Herald Square and the Japanese actor Toshiro Mifune.

Lucas, wracked by anxiety about completing his treatment, would force himself to work on his first draft from 9 to 5 every day.

Next, Lucas began inserting his names and places into a short narrative, not much more than a story fragment, called "The Journal of the Whills." He envisioned borrowing a storytelling device from the old Disney cartoons, showing a storybook—in this case the Journal of the Whills—"falling open in the opening moments of the movie to emphasize that whatever story followed came from a book," he told an interviewer. "This is the story of Mace Windy," wrote Lucas, underlining the name for emphasis, "a revered Jedi-bendu of Opuchi, as related to us by C.J. Thorpe, padawan learner to the famed Jedi." Over two densely written pages, Lucas crammed in plenty of names and backstory and was only just starting to wind himself into the barest hint of a plot—his heroes were "summoned to the desolate second planet of Yoshiro by a mysterious courier from the Chairman of the alliance"—when he trailed off practically in midsentence, already out of gas. It was a nonstarter, and Lucas knew it.

So he began again, making another list of names, scribbling out bits of plots and scenes he knew he wanted to include. "One of the key visions I had of the film when I started was of a dogfight in space with spaceships—two ships flying through space shooting each other. That was my original idea. I said I want to make that movie. I want to see that." Trying to get the dogfight in his head down on paper



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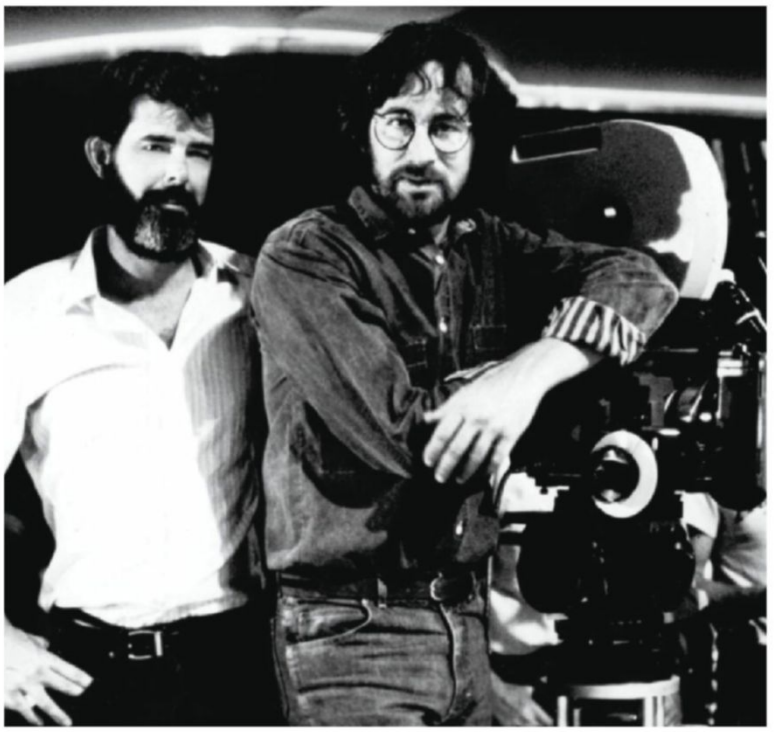
was difficult, however, so Lucas began taping old war movies on television, compiling footage of airplane battles from films like *The Bridges at Toko-Ri* and *Tora! Tora! Tora!* "I'd just edit it according to my story," he said later. "It was really a way of getting a sense of movement of the spaceships." Eventually he would have more than 20 hours of tape, which he would transfer to 16 mm film, then tightly edit down to a reel about eight minutes long. "I would have the plane going from right to left," explained Lucas, "and a plane coming toward us and flying away from us, to see if the movement would generate excitement."

While he didn't know it yet, the reel of dogfighting, swooping, tail-spinning aircraft would be one of the most important bits of film he would ever put together—the wet concrete he would pour into the mold for the cornerstone of his own film empire.

In May 1974—nearly eight months past his deadline—Lucas completed the rough draft of "The Star Wars." At 191 scenes and 33,000 words, it was crammed full of politics and backstory, but even in this early draft, parts of it sound familiar. The main character in this draft is a young man named Annikin Starkiller, who trains to become a Jedi Bendu under 70-year-old general Luke Skywalker. There are two droids providing comic relief, one short and squat, the other a gleaming "*Metropolis* style" robot, a reference to director Fritz Lang's mechanical woman in his 1927 Art Deco film. There's a "huge green-skinned monster with no nose and large gills" named Han Solo, a feisty 14-year-old Princess Leia, references to "lazerswords" and Wookiees, as well as to a "tall, grim-looking general"—and relatively minor character—named Darth Vader. And for the first time, one character bids goodbye with "May the Force of Others be with you." Lucas was still holding on to elements from his first treatment that he liked, including a fight in a cantina, a chase through an asteroid belt, a rescue from a prison and the concluding awards ceremony. But he was also struggling with parts of it: he wasn't quite sure yet what the Empire was searching for, and there were still too many characters, too many locations, too many backstories to sort through. But at least it was finished.

The script—with "eyes only!" stamped playfully across the title page—went over to Alan Ladd at Fox. "It was a long time coming," said Ladd. But he liked what he read—at least what he could understand of it—and, to the likely bafflement of some Fox executives, asked Lucas



From left: Lucas with his first wife, film editor Marcia Lucas, who won an Academy Award for her work on *Star Wars*; Lucas and Steven Spielberg were contemporaries and collaborators; Lucas with R2-D2 and Francis Ford Coppola, who was a mentor.

to begin working on a second draft. Back Lucas went to his writing room, to sit at his desk for eight hours each day, turning a pencil over and over in his hand, staring out the window, waiting for the muse. As the son of a stationer, Lucas was picky about his writing supplies; he would use only number-two pencils and regular blue-and-green-lined notebook paper. Drafts would be written out in his hunched cursive, the words growing fatter as his pencil dulled against the page. He was also carrying a little notebook with him at all times so he could write down names and ideas just as quickly as they came to him.

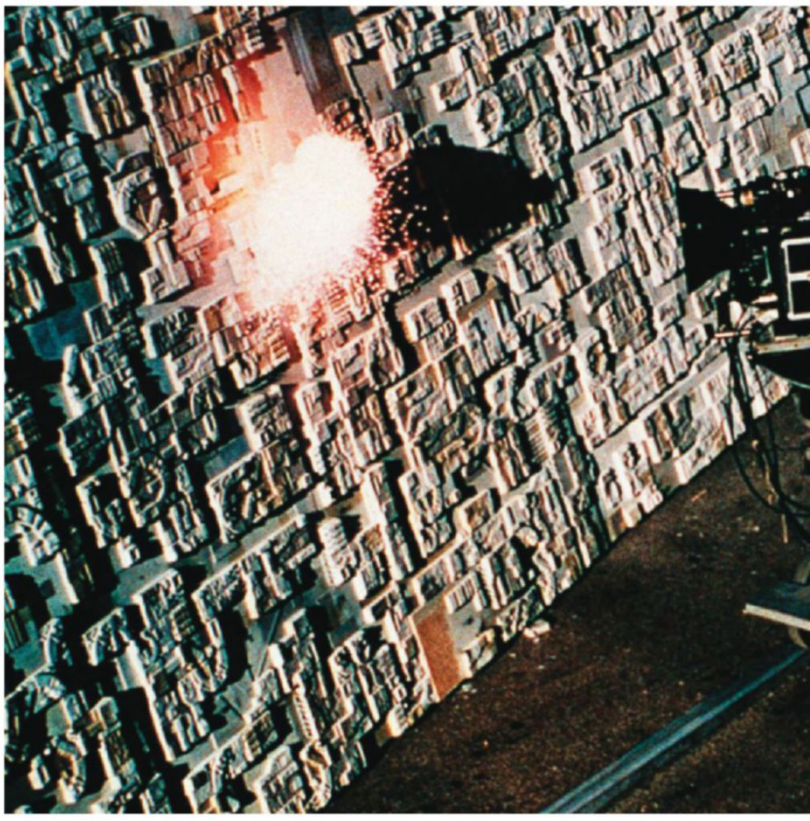
And inspiration, it seemed, could come from anywhere. One afternoon, Lucas's then-wife, Marcia, drove away from the house with their dog—an enormous Alaskan malamute named Indiana—sitting happily in the passenger seat next to her, his head brushing the ceiling of the car. Lucas thought the dog, nearly as big as a person, looked like Marcia's copilot—an image that would eventually evolve into Chewbacca, the copilot of the *Millennium Falcon*. Another important character had found his name in a throwaway comment from Walter Murch while he and Lucas were editing *American Graffiti*. The two of them had devised their own system for making sense of the racks of film reels and miles of film, assigning each of the reels, dialogue tracks and sound tracks its own identifying number. During one late-night session, Murch asked Lucas for Reel 2, Dialogue 2—but shortcut the request by asking for R2 D2 instead. Lucas loved the sound of it—the way a name sounded would always be important to him—and, after handing Murch the film cans, quickly scribbled "R2D2" down in his notebook. "As I was writing, I would say the names to myself, and if I had a hard time dealing with a name phonetically, I would change it," he said later. "It had to do with hearing the name a lot and whether I got used to it or not." At the moment, however, it seemed he hadn't gotten used to any of them—for in July 1974, as Lucas went through his rough draft again, he suddenly decided to change nearly every name in the script. R2-D2 became simply A-2. The Jedi Bendu became the Dai Nogas. Annikin Starkiller was redubbed Justin Valor, Leia became Zara, Wookiees became Jawas.

Still, changing character names was the easy part. Revising the story was harder—and for weeks, Lucas would stare at his notebook, then at the typewriter page, waiting for something, anything, to fire his imagination. "I sit there and wait for the mail to come," he sighed, "then I sit

and wait for 5 o'clock to come." Gray hairs began to fleck his beard. At times, he would snip absently at his hair with a pair of scissors, filling his trash can with the clippings. His mind wandered. "I can't help but think about things other than what I'm supposed to be thinking about," he admitted—and one morning, as he thought about the old Flash Gordon movie serials that had initially inspired *Star Wars*, he realized that he liked plenty of other old serials too. He was especially fond of *Don Winslow of the Navy*, about a naval intelligence officer who fights spies as he locates and explores a secret submarine base. Lucas liked that Winslow relied as much on his brains as his fists. "I began thinking it'd be a good idea to have an archaeologist in a 1930s-style serial," Lucas said. "So I'd make little notes about what it would be, who his character was, and how all that would work out. That's how I came up with the idea of Indiana Smith." That name—taken from his beloved malamute—he would also slightly change.

Lucas also sought the opinions of friends whom he trusted, including John Milius, Willard and Gloria Huyck, and Francis Ford Coppola. Lucas was genuinely interested in their comments, flying down to Los Angeles with nothing more than deodorant and a change of underwear so he could spend the night talking over his pages with the Huycks. "He'd take his notes, and he'd go and visit all his friends," said Willard Huyck. "Then he'd fly back home and rewrite [*Star Wars*] some more." Most of them still found the script incomprehensible; Coppola, however, offered few changes. "I thought it was terrific," he reassured Lucas.

In fact, Lucas and Coppola's relationship was warming again; in an interview published in *Film Quarterly* that spring, Lucas described their relationship in genuinely affectionate, almost brotherly terms. "We more or less work together as collaborators . . . We can bounce ideas off each other because we're totally different. I'm more graphics-filmmaking-editing oriented, and he's more writing and acting oriented. So we complement each other, and we trust each other," explained Lucas. "Half the time he says I'm full of sh-t, and half the time I say he's full of sh-t. It's not like a producer telling you that you have to do something. Francis will say, 'Cut that scene out, it doesn't work at all.' And I may

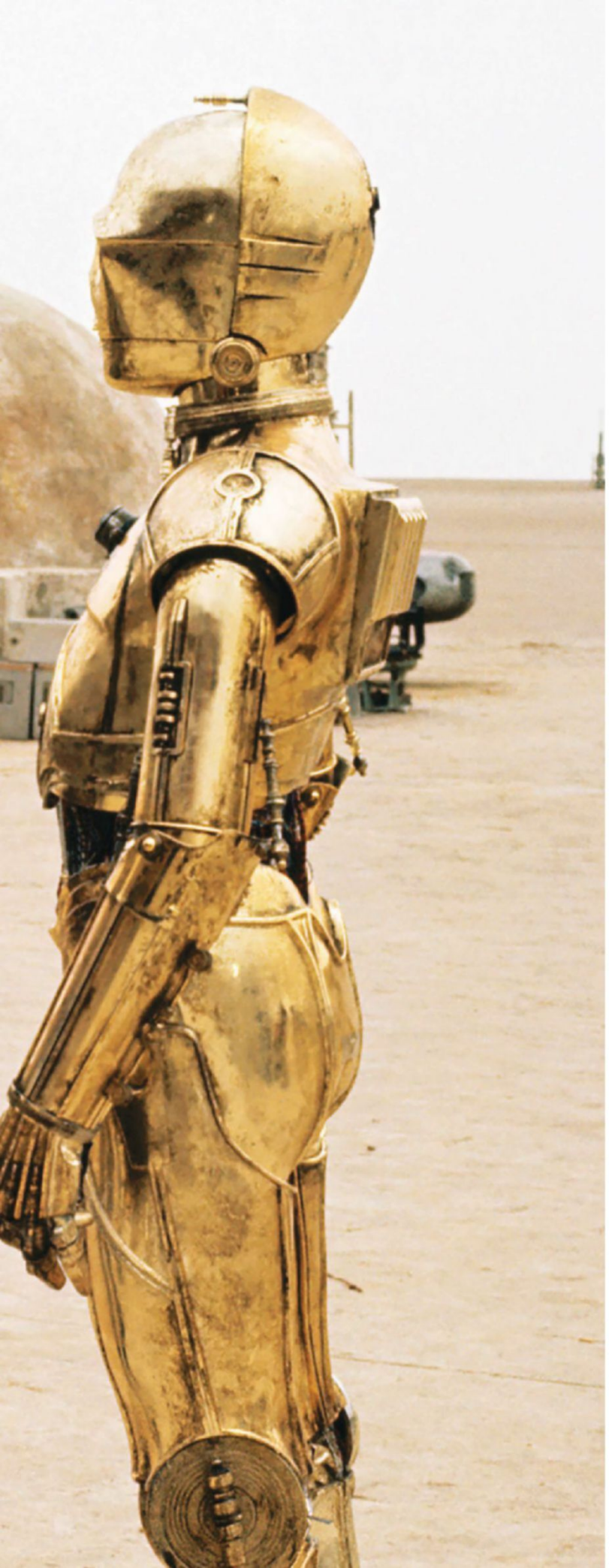


Top: *Star Wars* revolutionized special effects by filming miniatures in real time, rather than the more time-consuming methods of previous sci-fi fantasy. Bottom: Lucas with *A New Hope*'s stars.

say, 'No, you're crazy. That's my favorite scene. I love it.' And he'll say, 'OK, what do I care? You're an idiot anyway.' Actually, he calls me the 'stinky kid.' He says, 'You're a stinky kid, do what you want.' And I say the same thing to him. It works very well, because you really need somebody to test ideas on. And you get a piece of expert advice that you value."

Another friend whose opinion he valued was Steven Spielberg, whose company Lucas was enjoying more and more. In the summer of 1974, Spielberg was at work on *Jaws* for Universal, a project that would feature a gigantic mechanical shark that was still being constructed in a North Hollywood hangar. One afternoon, Spielberg took Lucas, Milius and director Martin Scorsese out to the warehouse to have a look at the half-completed monster shark, still on struts and suspended in slings. The thing was enormous—so big, in fact, that Milius thought the craftsmen were "overdoing it." As Lucas looked over the storyboards the artists were using for reference, he felt himself becoming slightly envious. "If you can get half of this on film," he told Spielberg, "you're gonna have the biggest hit of all time." (He would be right: soon after its 1975 release, *Jaws* would indeed become the highest-grossing film of all time—at least until Lucas surpassed it with *Star Wars* two years later.) Ever the gadget freak, Lucas climbed a ladder and leaned into the gigantic open mouth of the shark to see how it worked—at which point Spielberg mischievously seized the controls and slowly closed the mouth on Lucas . . . and then couldn't get it to open again. Lucas eventually shook himself loose, and the four filmmakers fled, convinced they'd broken Universal's prized prop.

As 1976 approached, Lucas was finishing up his fourth draft, now officially titled *The Adventures of Luke Starkiller, as Taken from the Journal of the Whills, Saga I: Star Wars*. Lucas was still paring down subplots and characters, removing elements that either slowed things down or required too much backstory. He had a much better handle on the Force at this point and had wisely decided to remove the Kiber Crys-



On set, Lucas directs Anthony Daniels, who plays C-3PO, a harried protocol droid who provides the series with its signature comedic foil.

tal from the story altogether, making the Force "more ethereal," he explained, rather "than to have it solidified in a thing like a crystal." The Force was "a big idea," he told science fiction writer Alan Dean Foster, whom he had personally tapped to write a novelization of the film. "[Luke] has to trust his feelings rather than his senses and his logic—that's essentially what the Force of Others comes down to."

There is no indication that Lucas ever intended for Darth Vader to be Anakin Skywalker or that he would be the father of Luke and Leia, twins separated at birth. While Lucas would, over the course of three decades, perpetuate a kind of retroactive continuity by asserting that this had been his plan all along, in 1975 he still clearly intended for Vader and Luke's father to be separate characters. Vader's backstory, he explained, was "about Ben and Luke's father and Vader, when they are young Jedi knights. Vader kills Luke's father, then Ben and Vader have a confrontation, just like they have in *Star Wars*, and Ben almost kills Vader." As for the name "Vader," Lucas has made much of the linguistic coincidence that Vader is the Dutch word for "father"—but it was also a name he'd likely heard nearly daily at Downey High School, where he had a schoolmate one grade ahead, an all-conference athlete named Gary Vader. For Lucas, who loved the way words sounded, it was too good a last name not to use.

By the time Lucas completed his fourth draft, on January 1, 1976, he had come a long way since the nonstarter Journal of the Whills, but he was still unhappy with it. "I had a lot of vague concepts," he remembered years later, "but I didn't really know where to go with it, and I've never fully resolved it. It's very hard stumbling across the desert, picking up rocks, not knowing what I'm looking for, and knowing the rock I've got is not the rock I'm looking for. I kept simplifying it, and I kept having people read it, and I kept trying to get a more cohesive story—but I'm still not very happy with the script. I never have been."

"In the end," Lucas said later, "I really didn't think we were going to make any money at all on *Star Wars*."

THE MANDALORIAN'S

I'LL HAVE WHAT HE'S HAVING

Pedro Pascal is back as Beskar steel–clad bounty hunter Din Djarin, better known to fans as the Mandalorian. By his side (or, rather, perched on his shoulder) is Grogu, aka Baby Yoda. Cantina scenes like this one are part of a long, proud tradition in the Star Wars franchise. Just ask yourself: Where did Luke first meet Han? This time around, the big question is whether these very cool customers are the hunters . . . or the hunted?

NEW MISSION

A BROODING BOUNTY HUNTER AND HIS PINT-SIZE PAL ROCKET TO THE BIG SCREEN

BY CHRIS NASHAWATY

During this year's CinemaCon gathering in April, Jon Favreau took the stage in front of a sea of giddy Star Wars fans. They hung on the director's every word. In fact, it felt a bit like one of those Steve Jobs revival meetings from the late 2000s during which he would reveal the latest top secret Apple gadget. On this day, though, Favreau wasn't selling a new iPhone or MacBook Pro, he was selling a movie. And not just any movie, but the first Star Wars movie in seven years, *The Mandalorian and Grogu*. But the filmmaker was also selling something bigger—he was selling the past, no doubt hoping some of its pixie dust would rub off on the future. "*Star Wars* made me fall in love with the movies," he told the crowd. "I saw it for the first time with my dad."

A lot of Star Wars fans can relate. Because no matter when you first visited George Lucas's galaxy far, far away, and regardless of where in the saga you first came in, this beloved franchise still represents the gold standard for pop cinema nearly 50 years after the generation-defining *A New Hope* hit theaters in 1977. This time around, the path to the big screen might have been a little different (the film follows three table-setting seasons of *The Mandalorian* on Disney+), but the faces will be familiar. Pedro Pascal will, of course, make the leap to the supersized screen as the fearsome bounty hunter Din Djarin. And his pint-size pal Grogu (aka Baby Yoda) is prepped and ready for his Hollywood close-up. But if you pay close attention to the photos on the following pages, you might spot a few new faces and other deliciously nerdy nuggets.

GIVING DIRECTIONS

Jon Favreau, cowriter, coproducer and director (left), gives some pointers between takes. Favreau, who began his career in front of the camera as an actor, has quietly developed to being one of the most trusted voices within the current Star Wars brain trust, having previously served as executive producer on *The Book of Boba Fett*, *Ahsoka* and *Skeleton Crew*. Still, you could argue that the Old West–flavored characters in *The Mandalorian* are the closest to his heart. Writing for the 2019 Disney+ series marked Favreau's baptism by fire into Lucas's cinematic universe.

DO NOT OPERATE HEAVY MACHINERY . . .

Unless, of course, you're a feared, galaxy-hopping tracker whom others speak of in hushed, reverent tones. Pascal saddles up on an AT-ST Walker in the new movie, but the snowy vibe of this scene can't help but spark nostalgia for Luke Skywalker on the ice planet Hoth in *The Empire Strikes Back*. That's a tough comparison to live up to, to be sure. Let's hope the howling blizzard goes a bit smoother for the Mandalorian. Action figures sold separately.

RIPLEY, BELIEVE IT OR NOT

No, *The Mandalorian and Grogu* doesn't exist in some bizarre crossover universe with Ellen Ripley and *Alien*. Instead, Sigourney Weaver joins Favreau's ensemble as Colonel Ward, a Rebel officer who isn't shy about giving Pascal's Din Djarin a piece of her mind between potentially deadly assignments, including his latest: tracking down Jabba the Hutt's son, Rotta.

GETTING A LIFT

Meet Bai, Clang and Keeto, a trio of new Anzellan characters seen here taking a spin with Grogu. For the uninitiated and those late to the party, the tiny, saucer-eyed species made its Star Wars debut with Babu Frik in 2019's *The Rise of Skywalker*. The Anzellans have a wide reputation throughout the galaxy for being master droidsmiths and expert mechanics. Think of them as the adorable gearheads of the Star Wars universe.

HUTT'S GROW UP SO FAST

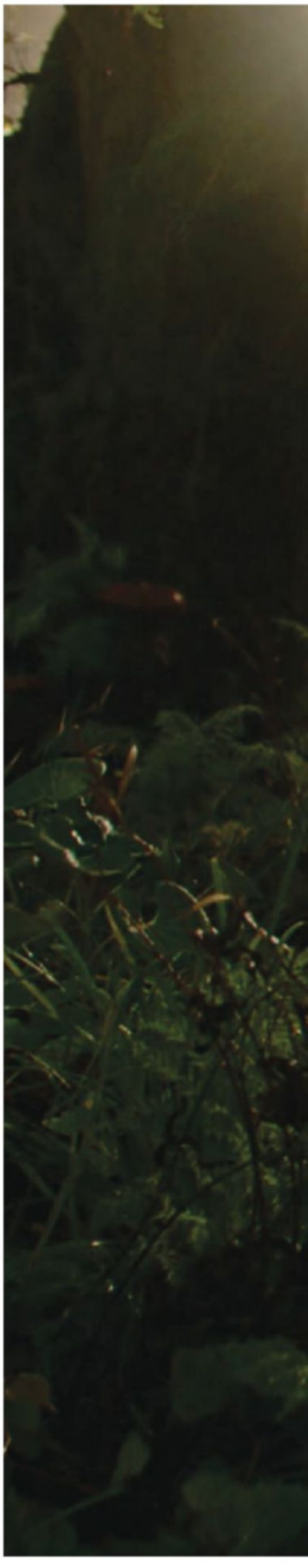
Just to be clear, Jabba the Hutt has not been hitting the gym on Tatooine to work on those six-pack abs. This is actually Rotta the Hutt, Jabba's son and criminal heir, who's trying to step out from his father's shadow. Originally introduced as a baby in the animated *Star Wars: The Clone Wars*, Rotta was kidnapped by the separatists under Count Dooku as a child and later rescued by Anakin Skywalker, according to canon. In the new film, Rotta is voiced by *The Bear*'s Jeremy Allen White.

HERE'S LOOKING AT YOU, KID

The relationship between Din Djarin and Grogu is many things: unlikely partners; master and apprentice; father and child. But in this scene from the new film, the pair look more like watchful private eyes on a daytime stakeout. Fans of the Disney+ *Mandalorian* series know Grogu's harrowing backstory, involving the purge at the Jedi Temple on Coruscant. As time has gone on, he's become more layered and less like a cuddly, cooing plush toy.

HAS ANYONE SEEN MY HELMET?

In a rare moment when his face isn't obscured by a bespoke Beskar visor, Din Djarin (Pascal) shoots a withering look. But who is it aimed at? According to the strict rules of his sect, the Mandalorian is only allowed to remove his helmet when he's alone. This is the Way, after all. Removing it in front of others comes with serious consequences. During the bounty hunter's three-season run on Disney+, helmet-less Din Djarin sightings were rare. And when they did pop up, you could be sure it was a crucial scene. Plus, when you've got a star as handsome as Pascal, showing his face isn't the worst idea.



IN THE LOTUS POSITION, I AM

There's something about this mossy setting that evokes Yoda's swampy home on Dagobah, where Luke Skywalker (and moviegoers) first met him, in *The Empire Strikes Back*. Although fans of *The Mandalorian* TV series were quick to christen the character Baby Yoda, little is actually known about Grogu's connection to the wise, 900-year-old syntax-spoiling Jedi. But that hasn't stopped fans from posting wild, far-fetched theories online.

SPARKS AND RECREATION

The Mandalorian and Grogu appear ready for a showdown during their quest to find the nefarious Rotta the Hutt. The way the characters are positioned in this scene feels very intentional, presenting Din Djarin's protective, paternal bond with Grogu. Although it's never explicitly spelled out, Grogu has had a huge impact on the lone-wolf bounty hunter, turning him from a cold-blooded mercenary into a warm father figure.

AUTEUR, AUTEUR

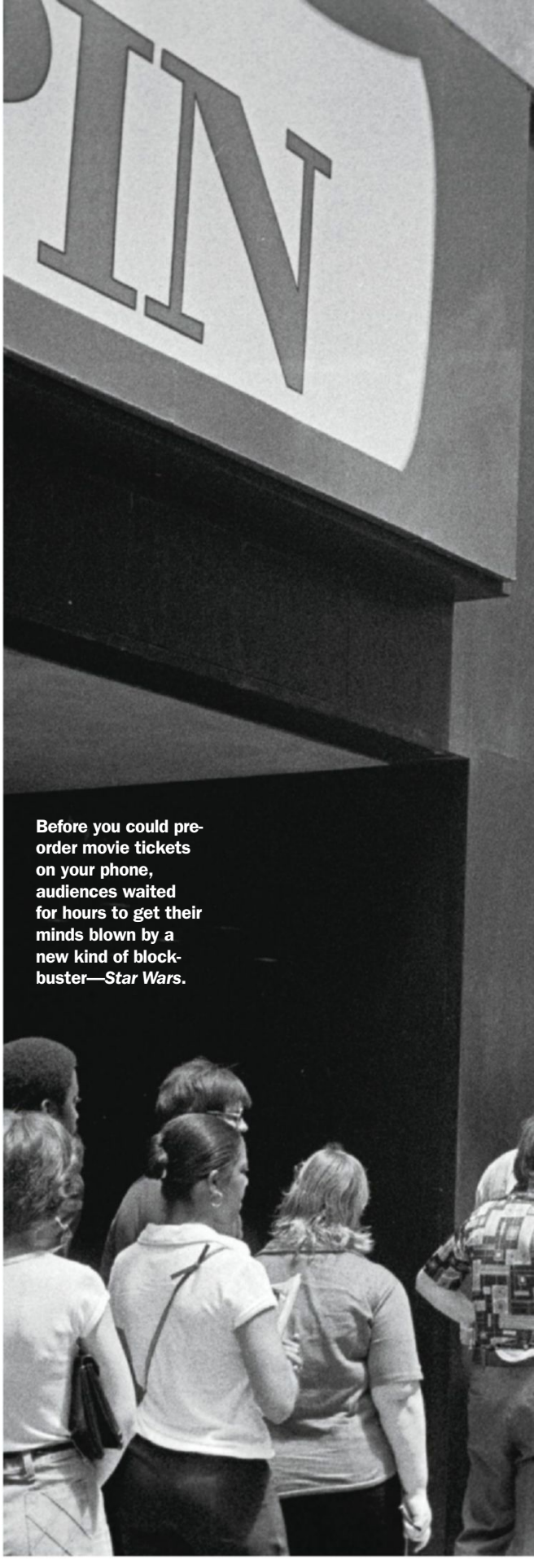
In a cheeky, note-perfect cameo for cineastes, Martin Scorsese (yes, that Martin Scorsese!) lends his signature rat-a-tat New York honk to a shopkeeper character simply known as “Ardennian fry cook.” And no, you’re not seeing things, he has four arms. Like most Ardennians, he has a penchant for gossip, which is why Din Djarin pays him a visit. But as soon as the fry cook hears the name Rotta the Hutt, he clams up and wants no part of the conversation.

A NIGHT AT THE FIGHTS

Meet Lord Janu (Jonny Coyne) and Hogsbreth (Matthew Willig), two well-connected spectators in the audience at a gladiator fight in the new film. Lord Janu (left) may look familiar to eagle-eyed fans. The Imperial warlord had a brief, blink-and-you-miss-it appearance as a hologram in an episode from the third season of *The Mandalorian*. As for the wonderfully named Hogsbreth, he is an Iktotchi, as denoted by his horns.

TIME GOES TO THE MOVIES: A LOOK BACK AT WHAT OUR CRITICS HAD TO SAY

In the summer of 1977, movie lovers lined up to feast their eyes on a strange new movie from a galaxy far, far away. We were there too. And like you, we've kept coming back to see each new chapter . . . for better and occasionally worse.



Before you could pre-order movie tickets on your phone, audiences waited for hours to get their minds blown by a new kind of block-buster—*Star Wars*.

ASTOR PLAZA
STAR WARS
PG
DAILY NEWS
ELECTRONICS
POLICE

ORIGINAL REVIEW
TIME, MAY 30, 1977

STAR WARS: A NEW HOPE

The time is long ago and far, far away. The beautiful Princess Leia, a leader of the rebellion against the evil Galactic Empire, has just been captured by an Imperial starship. She is now aboard the Empire's mobile command station, the impregnable Death Star, able to destroy whole planets with a single energy burst, and at this very moment she is being interrogated by Darth Vader, Dark Lord of the Sith, and the Grand Moff Tarkin—probably the nastiest pair of villains in the thousand worlds. What, they want to know, has she done with the stolen secret plans of the Death Star? If those computerized blueprints reach her Rebel friends, the corrupt Empire might fall—and freedom be restored to the galaxy.

But wait! Princess Leia does not have the plans. She has entrusted them to a little robot, Artoo Detoo, in the hope that they will reach a former general of the rebellion on the planet Tatooine. Artoo Detoo and his delicate robot friend Threepio have landed on Tatooine. As luck would have it, they have been picked up by Luke Skywalker, a handsome young farmer. Though Luke does not know it, his father also fought the Empire before he was foully murdered by Darth Vader. Luke, Artoo Detoo and the ungainly Threepio have been attacked by Tatooine's native nasties, the sand people, and they have only just been saved by an old hermit.

My gosh! No hermit he, but that former Rebel general, Obi-Wan Kenobi, for whom they had been looking.

Together, the four of them are even now setting out to deliver the secret plans to Rebel

The original *Star Wars* both launched a billion-dollar franchise and revolutionized special effects.

headquarters, light-years and parsecs away. But will they be in time to save the lovely Leia? And, anyway, what can a punk kid, a has-been general and a comedy team of robots do against the dark, illimitable powers of the Galactic Empire?

A universe of plenty—as audiences can discover beginning this week in *Star Wars*, a grand and glorious film that may well be the smash hit of 1977, and certainly is the best movie of the year so far. *Star Wars* is a combination of *Flash Gordon*, *The Wizard of Oz*, the Errol Flynn swashbucklers of the '30s and '40s, and almost every western ever screened—not to mention the Hardy Boys, "Sir Gawain and the Green Knight" and *The Faerie Queene*. The result is a remarkable confection: a subliminal history of the movies, wrapped in a riveting tale of suspense and adventure, ornamented with some of the most ingenious special effects ever contrived for film. It has no message, no sex and only the merest dollop of blood shed here and there. It's aimed at kids—the kid in everybody.

"It's the flotsam and jetsam from the period when I was 12 years old," says director George Lucas, 33.

"All the books and films and comics that I liked when I was a child. The plot is simple—good against evil—and the film is designed to be all the fun things and fantasy things I remember. The word for this movie is fun." For once, a director is right about his own work. *Star Wars* has brought fun back to the movies and glowingly demonstrated that they still can make 'em like they used to.

The film opens in 43 theaters across the country, but advance screenings and word-of-mouth have already given it an outsized reputation among film buffs and science-fiction addicts—two groups united usually only by their enthusiasm. The first week in April, indeed, 6,000 color transparencies from the film were stolen from the production offices; they are now selling for more than $5 each to sci-fi freaks. Some of the spaceship models used for special effects were later stolen from a workshop, and they too are being advertised on the open market. "*Star Wars* is the costume epic of the future," says Ben Bova, editor of *Analog*, one of the leading science-fiction magazines. "It's a galactic *Gone with the Wind*. It's perfect summer escapist fare."

At a special preview in San Francisco early this month, kids screamed in delight at the film's fantastic effects. At the end, while the lengthy credits rolled, the entire audience applauded for two or three minutes. "It was a supermarket audience, ordinary people," says Lucas, who was there and who still wonders at the reaction. "After something like that, you sit there and say, 'Gee, that's what it's all about.'"

The applause was sweeter still because so many people had expressed doubts for so long. Slight and bashful, Lucas hardly fits the image of the Hollywood director, and he had made only two pictures before: *THX 1138* and *American Graffiti*. Though the latter became the 11th-highest grosser of all time, Universal, the studio that financed it, believed that Lucas had gone, well, too far out when he handed in a 12-page outline for *Star Wars* in 1973. "I've always been an outsider to the Hollywood types," he explains. "They think I do weirdo films." Even close friends and film-school colleagues thought the idea for *Star Wars* a little strange—albeit for different reasons. They felt that Lucas should follow *American Graffiti* with a deep picture, one that had meaning, significance and recondite symbolism.

Of course, everybody was right: it was a weird idea to make a movie whose only purpose was to give pleasure. Says Lucas, "It's not a film about the future. *Star Wars* is a fantasy, much closer to the Brothers Grimm than it is to *2001*. My main reason for making it was to give young people an honest, wholesome fantasy life, the kind my generation had. We had westerns, pirate movies, all kinds of great things. Now they have *The Six Million Dollar Man* and *Kojak*. Where are the romance, the adventure and the fun that used to be in practically every movie made?"

Eventually, 20th Century Fox, which had made piles of money with another peculiar but good picture, *Planet of the Apes*, bought the idea, and Lucas set to work at the typewriter. Four versions and two years later, he was satisfied with his story.

Now the real—or at least, the visible—work began. At first, Lucas thought of making Tatooine, where much of the action takes place, a jungle planet, and producer Gary Kurtz went to the Philippines to scout locations. But the

bare thought of spending months shooting in the jungle made Lucas itchy, and presto, with the touch of an eraser, Tatooine became desert. Kurtz was off searching again, this time to Tunisia, which became Tatooine.

Most of the equipment, and half the actors, came from Britain. For Artoo Detoo, the squat little hero robot, production designer John Barry found "the smallest man in England," three-foot, eight-inch Kenny Baker. A machine that looks like a tank-type vacuum was built around him, with lights that he could switch on and off and legs into which he could fit his own. Other Artoo models were built—some scenes have three or four moving all at once—for radio control.

Artoo Detoo's faithful robot friend, Threepio, is supposed to look vaguely human, somewhat like the Tin Man in *The Wizard of Oz*. A plaster cast was made of British actor Anthony Daniels, who was to be the man inside. From that cast Barry constructed a golden figure of plastic, rubber, fiberglass, steel and aluminum. Threepio fairly glistened and shone when he was unveiled on the Tunisian set—but that was part of the trouble. It was so hot inside the robot body that Daniels nearly expired, and the machine's plastic and rubber joints were in danger of melting.

The first day of shooting, all the robots performed perfectly. It never happened again. Strange radio signals seemed to emanate from the Tunisian sand, and the remote-controlled Artoos ran wild, as if their oil had come from Vat 69. Says Barry, "I was incredibly grateful each time an Artoo actually worked right." Even Artoo Detoo, with Baker inside, seemed out of control. Baker could scarcely see where he was going through Artoo's headlights, and he bumped into the unwieldy Threepio, sending him tumbling. Daniels could not see much better through Threepio's eyes, covered with real gold to prevent corrosion, but thereafter he kept a wide distance between himself and the Artoos—whatever was inside them.

"I've always been an outsider to the Hollywood types. They think I do weirdo films," says Lucas.

Despite their problems, the two manned robots give standout performances as the Laurel and Hardy of the cybernetic world. With his English accent and his fussy manner, Threepio, the straight man of the pair, is a perfect picture of a butler who would never make it upstairs or downstairs. "We're doomed! We're doomed!" he bleats in typical panic. "This time we'll be melted down for sure!"

Artoo Detoo, on the other hand, is a manly little machine. He responds to Threepio's complaints with a variety of impatient beeps and whistles and, when busy, chirps and burbles like a mobile Mr. Coffee machine. When he gets zapped by Darth Vader, it is almost as traumatic for kids as that awful moment in *Bambi* when the little fawn's mother is slain by hunters. Fortunately for Artoo Detoo, however, not to mention the youngsters, there are replacement parts back in the shop.

The real wonder of *Star Wars*, however, is not the robots or the monsters, good as they are. It is rather the wizardry special effects, many of them never attempted or never possible before. Artoo Detoo, for instance, routinely delivers his message from Princess Leia by beaming a foot-high holographic projection of her, moving and talking in 3-D, right into the room. Later, in one of the movie's funniest scenes, Artoo and the Wookiee Chewbacca play a variant of chess with holographic figures. Instead of a bishop capturing a knight, a little dinosaur jumps a small, ectoplasmic BEM (as sci-fi fans call bug-eyed monsters) and proceeds to devour him. (Losing makes Wookiees so dyspeptic that Artoo is sagely counseled to let Chewbacca win.) All science-fiction movies these days are measured against Stanley Kubrick's monumental *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968). But even by that standard, *Star Wars* is tops. To work out the photographic special effects, Lucas hired John Dykstra, an expert in the field. For his space scenes, Kubrick had used what is called composite opticals: he would put one part of a scene—a spaceship, say—on film and black out the background. Then he would cover over the spaceship, roll the film through the camera again and put in another part of the scene, such as the moon behind the spaceship. And so on.

Mark Hamill, Carrie Fisher and Harrison Ford are all smiles in *A New Hope*. They must have read the reviews.

This process of multiple exposure was not only enormously expensive and time-consuming but also limited in what it could achieve.

Lucas and Dykstra had the advantage over *2001* of another decade of computer technology. They were able to link the camera to a sophisticated calculator, which recorded and memorized every shot. By consulting it they could add new elements to their scenes in far less time than it took Kubrick. The result is a breathtaking series of space shots unlike anything seen before in a science fiction film. Says Dykstra, "We have spaceships crossing over planets all the time, and Kubrick never did. His ships are almost invariably linear and can be seen only from one angle. Ours are seen in all conditions and from all angles." Whereas Kubrick had only about 35 different effects, Lucas has 363.

Not all the effects were computer inspired or controlled. For shots using miniatures, Lucas's crew cannibalized more than 300 model kits and collected parts from old tanks and World War II planes. When recasting their finds in plastic, they roughed them up as well. The result is a refreshingly lived-in, even beat-up, space world.

For the climactic battle sequence, which includes dogfights in space and missile runs on the Death Star, Lucas gathered all the old war movies he could find and spliced together their aerial-combat footage. "We did all that to get an idea of how to set up this scene," he explains. "It was all very complicated, with the most complicated sound problems, mixing and special effects." The dashing 10-minute sequence took eight weeks to edit (normally 105 minutes of a Lucas film can be edited in that time).

For all his basset-hound gloom, Lucas is a romantic—an innocent romantic. That innocence and that feeling for romance are what make *Star Wars* so fresh, so much fun and, finally, so fantastic. Lucas believed everything he put on film, and somewhere under the celluloid, he is Luke Skywalker—out to slay the dragon, rescue the princess and find the Holy Grail. Black is black, white is white, and good will conquer evil, at least in his screening room.

It is a simple moralism that many real science-fiction fans may not buy, and in sci-fi terms *Star Wars* is strictly softcore. Lucas, a fan himself, has evoked images from some of the best-known writers in the field.

Despite the talent and the money arrayed against it, *Star Wars* has one clear advantage: it is simple, elemental and therefore unique. It has a happy ending, a rarity these days. Princess Leia is saved, the Death Star is vaporized—oh, come on, you knew it all along—and Luke Skywalker, Han Solo, Artoo Detoo and Threepio receive the gratitude of freedom lovers everywhere. For most audiences, the only sadness in the climax is that the film ends and cannot go on and on and on. It is surely one of the swiftest two hours on celluloid.

But wait! Darth Vader has escaped, cloaked in evil and eager for revenge, and the Galactic Empire still holds in chains 1,000 solar systems. What hope have our gallant adventurers against forces so vast and so dark?

Another richly imagined universe of hope, obviously, and Lucas is already planning to bring them back in the sequel to *Star Wars*. This cannot be The End but is To Be Continued.

ORIGINAL REVIEW
TIME, MAY 19, 1980

THE EMPIRE STRIKES BACK

BY GERALD CLARKE

It took them long enough, but here they come. All the old friends and some favorite enemies have returned to brighten this unhappy spring. There's Luke Skywalker, that whiz kid from Tatooine, and there's Princess Leia, that cosmic man-killer. There are Han Solo and his furry eight-foot friend Chewbacca trying to get their beat-up old tub, the *Millennium Falcon*, to make the jump into hyperspace. And back, of course, are the Laurel and Hardy of the robot set, Artoo Detoo and See Threepio, in fine beep and polish.

But wait. What is that ominous sound in the background, that heavy breathing that strikes terror in the hearts of all those who love peace and freedom? It could only be the scourge of the universe, the nastiest man from here to infinity, archvillain Darth Vader, the Dark Lord of the Sith and leader of the Imperial Forces. It is time, in other words, to hurry up, buy the popcorn, M&M's or whatever else you like to munch in front of the silver screen, and grab a seat for *The Empire Strikes Back*.

When *Star Wars* ended, the Rebels—the good guys—had just destroyed the Empire's Death Star and were giving their two new heroes, Luke and Han Solo (Mark Hamill and Harrison Ford), some shiny medals to hang on their key chains. Darth Vader (David Prowse) had sneaked out through the back hatch, however, and as *The Empire* opens, he is sending the forces of the evil Empire to rout the Rebels from their hideout on the ice planet Hoth. Giant walking tanks blast the Rebel fortress, and Solo, Leia, Chewbacca (Peter Mayhew) and

Star Wars' return to theaters was more ambitious and darker, dominated by Vader's fiendish presence.

See Threepio (Anthony Daniels) barely manage to escape in the *Millennium Falcon*. That uncertain vessel refuses, however, to leap into hyperspace, and in order to evade pursuing Empire fighters, Solo runs through a perilous asteroid field. "They'd be crazy to follow us in here," he says. Eventually, they find what they think is refuge in a city in the clouds ruled by Solo's old friend in mild skulduggery, Lando Calrissian (Billy Dee Williams).

Luke, meantime, has been visited by the holographic presence of Obi-Wan Kenobi, or Ben Kenobi (Alec Guinness), who was translated to incorporeal planes by Vader in *Star Wars*. With the power of the Force behind them, old Jedi knights never die, it seems; they just fade in and out. Ben Kenobi tells Luke to seek out someone named Yoda on the planet Dagobah. Ben did not say that the place is all jungles and swamps, and Luke soon finds himself knee-deep in muck. Suddenly a strange little creature pops out. He looks like one of the gargoyles with whom the Hunchback used to play at Notre Dame. He even spouts a kind of Chaucerian Middle English, with many of his verbs and adjectives piling up at the end of sentences. Luke tries to shoo him away but discovers that this is his Jedi master.

Yoda, a 26-inch-tall Muppet operated by Frank Oz, the man in charge of Miss Piggy, is one of George Lucas's great fantastics. Part elf and part wizard, he is Dagobah's answer to the High Lama of Shangri-la. He has been training Jedi knights for 800 years. At first he hardly wants to talk to Luke. "No good," he says to Ben Kenobi, who has hovered into view once again. "I cannot instruct him. The boy has no patience. Much anger in him, like his father. All his life has he looked away—to the horizon, to the sky, to the future. Never his mind on where he was, on what he was doing. Adventure, excitement. A Jedi craves not these things!"

Eventually, of course, Yoda relents and instructs Luke in the ways of the Jedi and the uses of the Force, that strange, mystical power that all Jedis possess. "Life creates it and makes it grow," the little gnome explains. "Its energy surrounds us and binds us. Luminous beings are we . . . Feel the flow. Feel the Force around you." Luke does, to a degree. By an exertion of will, he can move rocks and other small objects—like a wildly beeping and protesting Artoo Detoo.

But Vader proves a difficult foe to vanquish. That is just as well for the story, because the Dark Lord is far more menacing in *The Empire* than he was in *Star Wars*, infused with hitherto unknown ambitions and desires, possessed of a mysterious past. There is a hint of a complex personality, and Vader, like all good villains, commands the screen whenever he appears, his black robes floating behind him like the shrouds of death. But once he has been given such prominence, he is a hard character for even his creator to control. With Vader dominating, perhaps even more than Lucas intended, *The Empire* finishes on a less satisfying and more ambiguous note.

In many ways the new film is a better film than *Star Wars*, visually more exciting, more artful and meticulous in detail. As a special effects wizard, Lucas fairly dazzles the eye with his optical magic. In one scene, for instance, the walking tanks are impervious to ordinary weapons, and Luke and his band of intrepid fighter pilots are forced to use older methods. Circling the legs of one of the giant camel-like machines, a Rebel fighter ensnares it, and it crumbles to the ground. On-screen that intricate maneuver takes perhaps 60 seconds, but to put it there took the technicians at Lucas's Industrial Light and Magic Inc. three months. Most impressive of all is the *Millennium Falcon*'s voyage through the asteroid field as it attempts to elude pursuing Imperial fighters.

Sequels of giant hits, like children who follow Daddy's favorite, always have an unfair burden. They are not examined on their own merits but in relationship to the picture everyone loved. In many ways Lucas and director Irvin Kershner have overcome that handicap. *The Empire Strikes Back* is a more polished and, in some ways, a richer film. But to imitate Yoda's way of speaking, and to answer the obvious question, as much fun it is not. Looking back at *Star Wars* and his other big movie, *American Graffiti*, Lucas discovered a common ingredient, what he calls an "effervescent giddiness." It is not a bad analysis, and *Star Wars* had more of it than does *The Empire*.

ORIGINAL REVIEW
TIME, MAY 23, 1983

RETURN OF THE JEDI

BY GERALD CLARKE

Stop for a minute! Do you really want to know, before you have seen the movie, the answers to some of the most intriguing questions of 1983?

Will Han Solo be freed from the carbonite in which he has been imprisoned? Will Luke Skywalker at last become a Jedi knight?

Is Darth Vader really Luke's father?

All this, and a bit more, will of necessity be revealed in the following paragraphs. Filmgoers who demand total suspense should now avert their eyes and wait patiently in line on Wednesday, May 25, when *Return of the Jedi*, the third of the *Star Wars* epics, opens in 950 theaters across the U.S. and Canada. Those who think they have already guessed the answers may read on, secure in the knowledge that the real surprises of the movie will not be unveiled in the pages that follow. So get ready for the final picture in George Lucas's marvelous rocket-propelled fairy tale and prepare your eyes for a constellation of special effects, a galaxy of monsters and a small world inhabited by fierce and furry teddy bears.

Return of the Jedi completes Lucas's trilogy. It is not as exciting as *Star Wars* itself, which had the advantage of novelty. But it is better and more satisfying than *The Empire Strikes Back*, which suffered from a hectic, muddled pace, together with the classic problems of being the second act in a three-act play. "I think *Jedi* is the best *Star Wars* movie ever made, and it is definitely going to be the most successful," says director Steven Spielberg, who as one of Lucas's closest friends is admittedly biased.

The final film of the original trilogy matured—in its acting, its effects and its storytelling.

"The first movie was the introduction; *Empire* was the second-act conflict. But they were mere canapés for this third-act opus. This is the definitive *Star Wars*."

So dim the lights and butter the popcorn. This is, after all, as Lucas keeps reminding us, a popcorn movie.

The maverick space pilot Han Solo (Harrison Ford), still encased in that carbonite, is a wall decoration in the castle of Jabba the Hutt on the desert planet Tatooine. Jabba, a huge, slobbering, sluglike creature resembling a repulsive mixture of Humpty Dumpty and Sydney Greenstreet, is Mr. Big in the galactic underworld. Around him he has assembled the vilest monsters in the universe.

Now, one by one, often in disguise, Han's friends come to rescue him: first that robotic dynamic duo, See Threepio (C-3PO), the gold-plated neurotic with a proper English accent (Anthony Daniels), and Artoo Detoo (R2-D2), who looks like a tank-type vacuum cleaner but has the heart of a lion. Then Solo's bearlike copilot Chewbacca, the seven-foot, five-inch Wookiee; the feisty Princess Leia (Carrie Fisher); and Lando Calrissian (Billy Dee Williams), the smooth-talking leader of *The Empire Strikes Back*'s Cloud City. And finally the hero, Luke Skywalker (Mark Hamill), who already has the most important Jedi weapon, the mysterious but potent powers of the Force.

Before Han is rescued, there are several close-fought battles, including one with a giant Grendel-like monster in the castle's dungeon, another with Jabba and his minions in anti-gravity sail barges, floating perilously above the desert pit that holds another, even more frightening monster. It swallows its victims, and they die ever so painfully during a dinner that lasts a thousand years.

All that is merely preliminary, however, to the real battle between the Rebel Alliance and the corrupt Empire, and to the contest of wills between Luke, the last of the Jedis, and the black-caped, black-masked Darth Vader. Yoda, the 900-year-old Jedi Master from *The Empire Strikes Back*, reappears to confirm what Luke feared most: Darth Vader is indeed his father, a former Jedi knight who was seduced by the evil Emperor and turned to the "dark" side of the Force, to hate rather than to love. Luke will never be a real Jedi, Yoda says, until he has confronted his father. At the end, the Emperor himself, a wizened, glowering old man in a sorcerer's cloak (Ian McDiarmid), watches as father and son struggle with each other. "Kill him," he tells Luke. "Your hate has made you powerful. Now, fulfill your destiny and take your father's place at my side!"

While that is going on aboard the Emperor's Death Star—a souped-up version of the one that Luke destroyed in *Star Wars*—his friends are confronting legions of Imperial Stormtroopers on the forested Moon of Endor. Their new allies are a tribe of primitive Ewoks, pugnacious little warriors who look like cuddly teddy bears but have the combative and fearless temperaments of Yorkshire terriers. There are dazzling, dizzying chases by flying speeder bikes through dense groves of giant redwood trees and eventually another full-blown space battle, as the ships of the Rebel Alliance try to destroy the Death Star.

Taken on its own terms—"Let's face it," says Hamill, "we made a film for children"—*Return of the Jedi* is a brilliant, imaginative piece of moviemaking. But it does not diminish the accomplishment of Lucas and his youthful team to say that there are flaws nonetheless. The most obvious, ironically, is an overemphasis on effects and a too proud display of odd-looking creatures. Some otherwise breathtaking scenes, such as the visit to Jabba's lair, the hair-raising chases through the redwoods and the climactic space battle, are extended to the point of satiety. The other flaw is the ending: in all three films, Lucas has almost entirely avoided the rank sentimentality to which his story is vulnerable. In the final minutes of *Jedi* he succumbs, however, and ends his trilogy with one of the corniest conclusions in recent years.

The acting in *Jedi* is better than it was in the other two. Ford was always good as the likable, daredevil cynic, but Fisher and, most particularly, Hamill have broadened and matured their talents. In his final scenes with Vader, Hamill provides Luke with a hitherto unsuspected depth of personality. Despite its shortcomings, the film succeeds, passing the one test of all enduring fantasy: it casts a spell and envelops its audience in a magic all its own.

ORIGINAL REVIEW
TIME, MAY 17, 1999

THE PHANTOM MENACE

BY RICHARD CORLISS

What you get in *The Phantom Menace* is a panoramic entertainment with several terrific set pieces of action, stalwart acting from the Brits (and some very raw work by the kids), a precise, luscious visual design, a multilevel climactic battle and a funeral pyre that echo *Return of the Jedi*, and a triumphal coda from the first *Star Wars* film (1977). All that, and a lot of talk.

The plot is familiar to anyone with access to a computer. Jedi Master Qui-Gon Jinn (Liam Neeson) and his apprentice Obi-Wan Kenobi (Ewan McGregor), hoping to settle a dispute between the flabby Republic and an insurgent Trade Federation, find Queen Amidala (Natalie Portman) on the planet Naboo. Diverted to Tatooine, they meet the boy Anakin Skywalker (Jake Lloyd), who has a mysterious force—perhaps the Force. They amass for a face-off against battle droids and the malefic Darth Maul (Ray Park).

A much-anticipated, and later much-maligned, return to theaters.

The plot is more complicated than this—and much chattier. Even the opening is talky. "Turmoil has engulfed the Galactic Republic," the now familiar trapezoidal text-crawl tells us. "The taxation of trade routes to outlying star systems is in dispute." Immediately one is perplexed. Can it be that director George Lucas was unable to dramatize these events, so he put them in the crawl? That would explain the gobs of dry exposition, devoted to blustering, filibustering debates on taxation and elections. It's all very edifying. Like . . . school.

This is the work of Lucas the compulsive chronicler of his own imaginary galaxy. But there are other Lucases. One is the grown-up kid who loves wise heroes and fast cars. That Lucas created a terse, looming Jedi knight in the person of Qui-Gon and orchestrated a spectacular, turbo-thrust drag race through desert rock that consumes 12 minutes and most of the audience's adrenaline supply.

There is also the Lucas who wants to dazzle filmgoers with his luxurious bestiary. The Gungan klutz Jar Jar Binks, who talks (sometimes unintelligibly) like a Muppet Peter Lorre, is more annoying than endearing. But the junk dealer Watto is a little masterpiece of design: cinnamon stubble on his corrugated face, chipped rocks for teeth, the raspy voice of Brando's Godfather speaking Turkish. Computer-generated critters are seamlessly integrated into live action—a superb technological achievement for Lucas's team.

We know that plucky Anakin will grow up to be Darth Vader, so the crepe of Fate hangs over his ascendancy. We are meant to root for the boy when he finds himself in a plane cockpit during the climactic battle, yet we know that the budding hero will later be a super-villain, as if Aladdin were to grow up to be Jafar.

We know too—anyway, some of us do—that the original *Star Wars* was at times a stilted enterprise, and that, as secret alliances and bloodlines were revealed, the series matured, grew into emotional resonance. For now, *The Phantom Menace* is a phantom movie, the merest hint of a terrific saga that the final two episodes of the new trilogy may reveal.

ORIGINAL REVIEW
TIME, MAY 20, 2002

ATTACK OF THE CLONES

BY RICHARD CORLISS

Recipe for a May blockbuster: teen misfit falls in love, disobeys a sympathetic father figure, battles monsters and stumbles toward a complicated manhood. We doubt that the *Spider-Man* people swapped script notes with George Lucas and his *Star Wars: Episode II Attack of the Clones* team; still, the similarities are striking. So, probably, are the eventual box office numbers.

Like the army of clones deployed in *Episode II*, a gaggle of critics have already spread the news that the picture stinks. It doesn't. It has more action than either *Spider-Man* or the last *Star Wars* film, *The Phantom Menace*. It's gorgeously designed and color-coordinated; the god who created this galaxy was working from a very rich palette.

After a ponderous return, the prequels shift into gear.

There's nothing deep or emotionally grand about this enterprise, but *Star Wars* never occupied that part of the cinema spectrum. The series was—and remains—Lucas's elaborate reconstruction of his Saturday-matinee memories and fantasies. This time the energy level is higher, the tempo brisker; a nice sense of doom crawls up the spine of the narrative. The leaden *Menace* was full of the posturing that two hostile nations engage in while marshaling their forces. In *Clones* the war breaks out.

The plot? It's boy (Anakin Skywalker, played by Hayden Christensen) remeets girl (Natalie Portman's Padmé Amidala), and a noble Jedi knight (Ewan McGregor as Obi-Wan Kenobi) meets a naughty one (Count Dooku, incarnated by Christopher Lee). Joseph Campbell might have gotten a kick out of the mythic reverberations, but for the rest of us the story is a thin clothesline on which to hang some terrific computerized beasties (the iguana hashslinger Dexter Jettster, the tall, graceful llama-lamas of planet Kamino) and fab set pieces (a treadmill struggle in the clone factory). Lucas guides these scenes with ingenious care. As for the actors, they're on their own, and it shows.

It's a melancholy fact that the *Star Wars* films with the strongest acting and densest mood are *The Empire Strikes Back* and *Return of the Jedi*—the two that Lucas didn't direct. That may be the bargain a director makes when he goes over to the digital side. He can animate a pixel but not a Portman. An often enchanting presence, the young star is stiff and humorless here. Christensen has to carry the emotional load. And he does a fine job: his Anakin is both a petulant, impetuous boy and a young man with an appraising stare.

Clones's visual effects can be buoyant. And they give a vertiginous kick to the fight scenes. A mile-high car chase has cool dips and speed bumps. A lightsaber duel in the dark has loads of drama and glamour. And at the end, when the now computerized Yoda finally reveals his martial artistry, the film ascends to a kinetic life so teeming that even cranky adults may rediscover the quivering kid inside. That child doesn't think about the labor that went into all these cybersaber dances. He doesn't think at all. He just stares up in innocent awe, at one with movie magic.

ORIGINAL REVIEW
TIME, MAY 9, 2005

REVENGE OF THE SITH

BY RICHARD CORLISS

Toward the end of *Revenge of the Sith*, the malefic Darth Sidious advances on Yoda, most of whose comrades on the Jedi Council have been cruelly cut down as the Republic is betrayed and the evil Empire spreads its vulture wings. "At last," the Sith Lord hisses, sensing victory over a foe, "the Jedi are no more." Yoda, with all the knowledge and power of the Force compacted into a two-foot ball, squints sternly and issues one of his upside-down oracular sentences: "Not if anything to say about it I have."

On May 19, the narrative arcs of the grand *Star Wars* epic, gracefully bending in a double helix, will be complete. Anakin (Hayden Christensen), the handsome, headstrong young Jedi, will be lured by impulses both arrogant and poignant to collide with his awful fate.

Under Darth Sidious, the Sith Empire will shred and swallow up the fragile Republic. Anakin's Jedi guru, Obi-Wan Kenobi (Ewan McGregor), will scuttle into hiding, as will Yoda. Over the galaxy, the silence of repression will fall, broken only by the cries of two infants, Luke and his twin sister, Leia. "This is the movie that people have wanted to see," says Christensen, who in *Sith* steps confidently into Anakin's turbulent and agonized manhood. "And it does it in a clever enough way that you're never a step ahead of the story."

Clever, indeed. After two episodes—*The Phantom Menace* (1999) and *Attack of the Clones* (2002)—that often dawdled in political filibustering and starchy line readings, after the fan base's outrage at the unfortunate Jar Jar Binks incident, *Revenge of the Sith* shows director George Lucas storming back as a prime confector of popular art. Again one feels the sure narrative footing of the first *Star Wars*, the sepulchral allure of *Empire*, the confident resolution of a dozen plotlines that made *Jedi* a satisfying capper to the original enterprise. True, Lucas can pack little surprise into a backstory that's obliged to complete the saga's circle in the middle. But there's an origami elegance to his folding of the old (new) story into the new (old) one. Lucas is nothing if not an expert extender of his franchise.

Sith has some clunky bits—all the films have those. But McGregor grows and grays intelligently into the middle-aged Obi-Wan, and his fellow Scot Ian McDiarmid has a starmaking turn as Chancellor Palpatine. It is brooding stuff, the most violent of the series—it's rated PG-13—about the coming-of-rage of a classic villain. Anakin even has a bit of Shakespearean resonance: the conflicted Hamlet finding the grasping pride of Macbeth, the noble assassin Brutus festering into a yellow-eyed Titus Andronicus.

The darkest and most violent prequel is also the most satisfying.

Lots of people will fill theaters around the world to judge the latest and last *Star Wars* (for now). True believers will debate and deliberate over each scene with the severity of a Jedi Council. The rest of us will breathe a massive sigh of relief that Lucas found the skill to make a grave and vigorous popular entertainment, a picture that regains and sustains the filmic Force he dreamed up a long time ago, in a movie industry that seems far, far away. Because he, irrevocably, changed it.

ORIGINAL REVIEW
TIME, DECEMBER 16, 2015

THE FORCE AWAKENS

BY STEPHANIE ZACHAREK

When you've been charged with reviving one of the most obsessively beloved franchises in modern movies, is it better to defy expectations or to meet them? With *Star Wars: The Force Awakens*, J.J. Abrams splits the difference. For the first 40 minutes or so, *The Force Awakens* feels like something special and fresh: for one thing, Abrams and his team of designers and technicians introduce a new star, a droid named BB-8. A roly-poly cue ball with a surprisingly expressive half-dome for a head—and a vocabulary of squeaks and squiggles that are more eloquent than mere words—BB-8 is a marvelous creation that could have sprung from the imagination of Jules Verne. And Abrams introduces a note of glorious melancholy in the character of Rey (newcomer Daisy Ridley), a teenage scavenger marooned on a sandy planet, longing to find her way back to her family. Rey's loneliness and her self-sufficiency are intertwined. Early in the movie, when she befriends BB-8 (another orphan of sorts), it's a meeting of kindred spirits. At that point, Abrams makes us believe anything could happen—the best kind of movie feeling.

But somewhere along the way, Abrams begins delivering everything we expect. He's taken care to do certain things right: the plot is relatively unencumbered by complicated mythology. The script was written by Abrams, Lawrence Kasdan and Michael Arndt (based on characters created by George Lucas), and they're more interested in clarity than exclusivity. The story takes place 30 years after *Return of the Jedi*. The fascist First Order has risen from the remains of the old Empire. Darth Vader disciple Kylo Ren (Adam Driver) is one of the chief baddies, answering to Supreme Leader Snoke (Andy Serkis), a giant, scary, noseless dude who sits placidly in an oversized chair like a dark-lord version of the Lincoln Memorial. The First Order hopes to destroy . . . everything. Luckily, the Resistance is ready to fight back: Princess Leia (Carrie Fisher) is now a general; her brother, Luke Skywalker (Mark Hamill), the last Jedi and a key player in the struggle, has gone missing. The new characters folded into the mix include Finn (John Boyega), a renegade Stormtrooper who becomes an accidental hero, and stalwart Resistance fighter pilot Poe Dameron (Oscar Isaac). But the wry, grizzled soul of the movie is Han Solo (Harrison Ford), who returns with his furry sidekick Chewbacca.

A new generation of Star Wars heroes intermingles with the old.

Yet *The Force Awakens* adds up to something less than the sum of its parts. The film is hardly a failure. It has its share of charm, like the moment when Han and Leia reconnect after years of separation. As Kylo Ren, Driver, kitted out in an all-black man-gown, is surprisingly menacing. In one of the movie's finest moments, Ren—unmasked and intense—engages Rey in a major stare-down. The sexual energy between them is strange and unsettling, like a theremin sonata only they can hear.

Mostly, *The Force Awakens* strives to please instead of surprise. Abrams wants us to walk away happy. He just doesn't give us much to take home.

ORIGINAL REVIEW
TIME, DECEMBER 13, 2016

ROGUE ONE

BY STEPHANIE ZACHAREK

One of the most derisive things you can say about a fictional woman character is she doesn't have agency. What almost no one says is that agency is the least interesting thing a woman can have. We're in such a rush to have stories about women who do things that we haven't thought much about what they should be doing. Kicking ass? Leaving bad husbands? Driving cars off cliffs? All of those can be great things, in the right story, but you can't just sew bravery onto a character like a Girl Scout patch. In *Rogue One: A Star Wars Story*, Felicity Jones stars as Jyn Erso, a young woman whose father, Galen Erso (Mads Mikkelsen), was snatched away from her years ago by Empire thug Orson Krennic (a weasely Ben Mendelsohn). Galen is a weapons engineer, and Krennic needs his skills to build the ultimate weapon: the Death Star. Jyn is left to make her way in the world alone, eventually finding a purpose when she meets Rebel fighter Cassian Andor (Diego Luna). At first, Jyn doesn't like Cassian much. Then she likes him a lot. If you lose track of the plot, just remember this: a bunch of people have to go to the place to get the thing. *Rogue One*, directed by Gareth Edwards (the listless, monotone 2014 *Godzilla*), has been designed as a Star Wars stand-alone, a picture that takes place within the Star Wars universe but which introduces new characters and storylines. That's not a bad idea, but what you do with it counts. Visually, Edwards and cinematographer Greig Fraser have chosen to go with a studied, semi-gritty palette—a kind of intergalactic dishwater fugue.

The first Star Wars spin-off adventure.

The Rebel Alliance is fighting for something important, but what was it again? The freedom to wear something other than drab, tattered, sub-Eileen Fisher linen? (Not such a bad thing to fight for.) The story hits every expected beat, right when you expect it to. As Jyn, Jones comes at the material gamely. Her character gets to run around and discharge firearms. And while this is the sort of thing we want women to do in movies, it isn't necessarily more interesting just because a woman is doing it. (Charlize Theron's one-armed renegade Furiosa, from *Mad Max: Fury Road*, is an example of how to do it right, a character whose tendency toward violence is the fabric of her vitality.) Jones is a capable actress, but the movie asks her to strike a tough-girl pose she can't sustain, at least not without flaring her nostrils excessively. Still, there are a few bright dots of rouge in *Rogue One*. At one point Jimmy Smits sweeps by in some primo Flash Gordon wear. Franchise loyalists will recognize him as Bail Organa, from *Revenge of the Sith* and *Attack of the Clones*, a reminder of the days when the Star Wars franchise was a bountiful font of drag-queen names. *Rogue One* made me nostalgic for those movies, a thing I never thought I'd say. They scooted along, semi-efficiently, on the fumes of their own ridiculousness. Toward the end of *Rogue One*, a light saber finally appears, and the picture levitates, if only for a moment. This latest Star Wars spin-off will not change lives for the worse or for the better, and it will—or ought to—offend no one. In other words, Welcome to the Republic of the Just OK.

ORIGINAL REVIEW
TIME, DECEMBER 12, 2017

THE LAST JEDI

BY ELIANA DOCKTERMAN

To say that Rian Johnson's *Star Wars: The Last Jedi* is watchable even by those who have zero investment in the *Star Wars* franchise or its characters may sound like faint praise, but it's really the highest. Johnson, who also wrote the script, has taken a property—one that by this point has so many characters, so much mythology and so many requirements—and given us an actual *movie*. Most big-ticket franchise filmmaking these days amounts to ticking off a series of boxes. If Johnson has ticked any, he's done it in private, shielding us from all those horrid practicalities. His movie has a sense of humor about itself and a sense of joy, but its emotional generosity, even in the midst of all the extravagant green-screen work, is its best special effect.

***The Last Jedi* is a Star Wars movie that's truly for everyone.**

The Last Jedi takes off like a shot. Johnson has to deal with the classic Star Wars franchise problems—you've got to find something meaningful for all these characters to do, and all of it must cohere into an at least semi-meaningful plot. At times the movie feels cluttered. How could it not be? But Johnson makes the most of individual scenes, shaping each with care and vigor. And he does well by every character, the old ones—like Stormtrooper–turned–Resistance fighter Finn—as well as the new: Laura Dern shows up as a military leader with a fluff of violet flapper hair that belies the steel at her core. And the movie introduces a sweetly appealing character named Rose (Kelly Marie Tran), a shy Resistance underling who at first worships the movement's heroes and then gets a chance to become one herself.

Johnson made his entrance as a filmmaker with the 2005 indie hit *Brick*, and his last feature was the 2012 futuristic crime drama *Looper*. Neither picture would suggest that he'd be this good at huge-budget mega-blockbuster fantasy filmmaking. But as it turns out, he has a gift for orchestrating massive action scenes with specificity and a light touch: the finest is a multiplayer lightsaber battle that's regal and thrilling, a gorgeous set piece that seems to take its cues in part from Balinese puppet theater.

There's wonderful stuff here, like a gang of friendly crystal foxes who skitter across an icy landscape on dainty tapered paws. And an old, pointy-eared favorite makes a ghostly, thoughtful cameo. But it's Johnson's handling of Leia's character that says the most about his approach to the material. Because Fisher is now gone, you'd assume that Johnson would have written Leia out of the story with a grand, melodramatic flourish. That's what almost any other filmmaker would have done, and it would have been fine. Instead, Johnson gives us something at once more delicate and more satisfying. We've already had to say goodbye to Fisher in real life. In *The Last Jedi*, Johnson gives her an alternate ending, refusing to milk tears from us and instead allowing us to revel in all that was great about her, her sandpaper-velvet voice and her decisive way around a wisecrack. No matter how much money has been poured into a movie, it's emotional generosity that matters, and Johnson gives without squandering.

ORIGINAL REVIEW
TIME, MAY 16, 2018

SOLO

BY STEPHANIE ZACHAREK

With his slow-burning, honest-Ma-it-wasn't-me grin, Alden Ehrenreich, as the junior version of Han Solo in *Solo: A Star Wars Story*, looks more like a young Dennis Quaid than a sapling Harrison Ford. But no matter: he's appealing anyway, and that's key to any pleasure you might draw from Ron Howard's wobbly foray into the Star Wars sidebar universe. The picture starts out slow, even though Howard and writers Jonathan Kasdan and Lawrence Kasdan try to goose it with a few aircraft battles. But it's all too generic to mean much. Worse yet, the first two-thirds of the picture look dim and murky, as if it had been shot through a scrim of dust motes. Since these movies are so dependent on digital enhancement, it's hard to know whom to blame for that: cinematographer Bradford Young has shot some gorgeous-looking movies, like the somewhat naturalistic space-visitor picture *Arrival*. Maybe the whole thing is just an elaborate public-service announcement for glaucoma testing.

A new origin story for an old friend.

And to the degree that it matters, the plot is throwaway. We first meet young Solo on the squalid planet Correllia, a society of runaways and ne'er-do-wells. He's got a girlfriend, Qi'ra (Emilia Clarke); he dreams of being a pilot. Desperate to escape his grungy surroundings—not that his environs improve much visually after he does so—he enlists with the Empire and goes to war, where he meets another grifter, Beckett (Woody Harrelson). The story involves the theft of a cache of coaxium, which is both starship fuel and fuel for a revolution. Like oil, it's the sort of thing people fight over, and the villainous mogul Dryden Vos (Paul Bettany, with pinky-red tiger stripes on his face) wants the juice for himself.

Solo: A Star Wars Story brightens up a little in the second half, both visually and in terms of plot momentum. And at the very least, you'll find out how Solo and his future copilot and loyal sidekick Chewbacca (Joonas Suotamo), met. Hint: They're stuck in a hole, and there's mud. The hard truth about this just-OK Star Wars universe plug-in is that Howard simply may not be the best director of special-effects-heavy space operas. But that's a dubious badge of distinction anyway. He has better luck with actors, and just about everyone does good work here: Clarke is vibrant and subtle, even in a cartoony role. And Donald Glover is a blast as Solo's friendly nemesis, Lando Calrissian. Star Wars lore is woefully lacking in sex appeal—even Han Solo is more of a guy's guy—but Glover has an unruly, charismatic elegance. He belongs in a better movie, but at least he perks this one up.

Glover also gets some of the best costumes, including a selection of capes à la Screamin' Jay Hawkins. If nothing else, *Solo: A Star Wars Story* features some fabulous clothes, courtesy of costume designers David Crossman and Glyn Dillon. At one point Clarke's Qi'ra shimmers into a room wearing a slinky black Halston-style gown with a decorative metal disco-choker attached, like something Bianca Jagger would have worn to Studio 54. It could never be as iconic as, say, Princess Leia's snow-angel robe, but it's a lot hipper, and it's one of the things that saves this Star Wars story from total squaresville.

ORIGINAL REVIEW
TIME, DECEMBER 18, 2019

THE RISE OF SKYWALKER

BY STEPHANIE ZACHAREK

Star Wars: The Rise of Skywalker, opens, as the Star Wars films traditionally do, with a crawl: "The dead speak!" it tells us. What are they saying? Wouldn't *you* like to know. At the end of 2017's *Star Wars: The Last Jedi,* directed by Rian Johnson, First Order baddie Kylo Ren (Adam Driver) killed the even bigger baddie Snoke (Andy Serkis) and declared himself Supreme Leader. At the beginning of *The Rise of Skywalker,* directed by J.J. Abrams, we see new Supreme Leader Kylo fondling a glowing green power thingie. Pay attention to this power thingie, because for most of the movie . . . you'll see neither hide nor hair of it. But you know it's got to mean *something*.

***The Rise of Skywalker* is all about "Go . . . go . . . go!"**

Meanwhile, Kylo receives orders from a dead person—the dead are speaking, just as promised. Hotshot pilot Poe Dameron (Oscar Isaac) is flying around and grousing about various indignities. Former Storm Trooper, now Resistance fighter, Finn (John Boyega) spends much of his time at Poe's side being charmingly conciliatory; occasionally he gets to be heroic.

If you didn't much care for Finn's smart, appealing sidekick and potential love interest from the last movie, engineer Rose Tico (Kelly Marie Tran), you're in luck—here she's stuck on the ground tinkering with spaceship engines, behind the scenes. The fans have spoken.

Stuff happens in *The Rise of Skywalker*. Just when you think stuff is going to stop happening, it keeps happening. Characters die temporarily and then—surprise!—turn out to be not dead at all. Or they die and they're resurrected. To be fair, a few really do just die.

There are one or two pleasures to be had in *The Rise of Skywalker*. Many of the characters and things you want in a Star Wars movie are here, including C-3PO (Anthony Daniels) and Chewbacca (Joonas Suotamo), as well as the *Millennium Falcon*, in all its ramshackle glory. But overall, there are so many characters—new ones as well as old—and so much mythology to tie up, that interactions between individuals often seem like afterthoughts.

It's hard to gauge exactly how many of *The Rise of Skywalker*'s problems are specifically Abrams's fault. In working so hard to please the franchise's fan base, Abrams lost every chance at adding a spark of originality. Fantasy is compelling to children because it gives them a sense of control over the uncontrollable: an enemy can be vanquished with the help of a lightsaber. You can triumph over evil if you're really, really good.

But this new world order, in which fans decide what they want and don't want in their cherished franchises, is the enemy of creativity and imagination. The most vocal, hardcore *Star Wars* fans—most of them full-fledged grownups—don't just fantasize about having control; they've found a way to get it, and their tyranny is oppressive.

However you feel about George Lucas's 1977 *Star Wars*, it was at least a picture made by an inventive weirdo with a distinctive vision. No wonder people were delighted by it. Now, delight has been replaced with duty. The fans have formed their own empire, and it hasn't just struck back; it's won.

STAR WARS ON THE SMALL SCREEN

WHEN DISNEY ACQUIRED GEORGE LUCAS'S STORIED SCI-FI FRANCHISE, THE SAGA ENTERED THE STREAMING ERA—WITH MIXED RESULTS. OUR RANKING OF THE SHOWS . . .

BY MEGAN MCCLUSKEY, ELIANA DOCKTERMAN AND CHRIS NASHAWATY

In the wake of the success of *The Mandalorian*, Disney+ has produced many—arguably too many—Star Wars television series in hopes that the expanded universe content would draw die-hard fans of Jedis and droids to the streaming service.

The results have been mixed. Baby Yoda justifiably drew hordes of fans and plenty of coos when he used the Force to summon blue macarons in *The Mandalorian*. (Yes, we know his name is Grogu, but Baby Yoda sounds cuter.) And *Michael Clayton* scribe Tony Gilroy found impressive depth in the *Rogue One* prequel series *Andor*, a Star Wars show that's managed to rack up a galaxy of Emmy nominations and five wins. But then there were spin-offs like *The Book of Boba Fett* and *Obi-Wan Kenobi* that ultimately left some fans frustrated with how Lucasfilm handled stories related to favorite characters in the franchise.

Still, the Star Wars television universe is growing not only in size, but in importance. After all, *The Mandalorian and Grogu* marks the first Star Wars movie to hit theaters in nearly a decade, and it's more than likely that additional jumps between your living room's small screen and the bigger one at the multiplex will follow suit. In the meantime, we've put together our definitive ranking of all seven of the Disney+ Star Wars live-action shows, from best to worst.

1. ANDOR

Andor has no right to be so good. It's a prequel to *Rogue One*, itself a prequel to *A New Hope*. One might expect it to be filled with easter eggs and winks. Thankfully, showrunner Tony Gilroy, who cut his teeth on the *Bourne* movies, has higher ambitions. The show centers on Cassian Andor (Diego Luna), a Rebel spy in *Rogue One* ready to die for his cause. But when we meet Cassian in *Andor* he's a cynical mercenary, skeptical that the upstart Rebellion can take on the Empire. But as he takes on missions, finds himself in binds, and begins to see the banality of evil up close, his politics and worldview start to change. There's no Sith Lord laughing maniacally as he tortures Cassian. Just nameless guards and soldiers whose faces remain impassive as they inflict suffering on others. And both the Rebels and Empire often use the same turns of phrase to describe their cause, a decision that intentionally blurs the lines between the good guys and the bad. It's a fascinating study of how a citizen is radicalized to become a freedom fighter. For those reasons and more, that's why the thrilling *Andor* tops this list.

2. THE MANDALORIAN

After three seasons, the novelty of the crown jewel of Disney's Star Wars TV universe has somewhat worn off. While the father-son relationship between Pedro Pascal's Din Djarin and his Baby Yoda ward Grogu remains as adorable as ever, the show's recent meandering storylines have burned through a lot of fan goodwill. Still, there's a reason why *The Mandalorian* was the most-watched streaming original of 2023. Set around five years after the fall of the Empire in *Return of the Jedi* and 25 years before the rise of the First Order—the authoritarian regime firmly in control of the galaxy when *The Force Awakens* begins (but you remembered that, right?)—the first two seasons of the inaugural live-action Star Wars series revived the spirit of the franchise with new and exciting characters whose adventures originally extended beyond the scope of the over-tread Skywalker saga. The result was a pop culture phenomenon that instantly grabbed viewers' attention and sparked renewed interest in the galaxy far, far away. Not to mention countless Baby Yoda memes.

3. AHSOKA

In the wake of Rosario Dawson's introduction as Ahsoka Tano in season 2 of *The Mandalorian*, *Ahsoka* follows the former Jedi Knight as she navigates her role in the galaxy in the years after the Empire's defeat in *Return of the Jedi*. Helmed by Star Wars veteran Dave Filoni, the series builds on the backstory for Ahsoka that was established in the 2008 animated Star Wars movie *The Clone Wars*—in which a young Ahsoka becomes the Padawan apprentice of Anakin Skywalker—and its subsequent TV series, *The Clone Wars and Rebels*. An uneven first season saw Ahsoka team up with some of her fellow Ghost crew resistance fighters, like Mandalorian warrior Sabine Wren and New Republic general Hera Syndulla, to investigate rumors that former Imperial commander Grand Admiral Thrawn is poised to return as heir to the Empire. Fans of Filoni's more mystical take on Star Wars lore likely enjoyed this one.

4. OBI-WAN KENOBI

Obi-Wan Kenobi suffers from the most common prequel affliction: How do you build suspense in a story when the audience already knows the ending? Set between the events of *Revenge of the Sith* and *A New Hope*, the show follows its titular character as he abandons his job watching a (safe) young Luke on Tatooine to save a kidnapped Princess Leia. Parts of the plot are absurd: a precocious 10-year-old Leia is repeatedly able to outrun powerful bounty hunters. Sure. But *Obi-Wan*'s greatest weakness is its insistence on building out lore for characters who already carry so much history. The entire series builds to confrontations between Obi-Wan and Darth Vader that are zapped of all tension because nothing of significance could happen when these two meet. Any injury or even mildly interesting conversation between the two surely would have come up during their encounter in *A New Hope*. And so *Obi-Wan* finds itself hamstrung, inventing convoluted ways for nothing to happen in its plot.

5. SKELETON CREW

Star Wars has always been a sci-fi/fantasy tale aimed squarely at the kiddie segment of the audience. But in *Skeleton Crew*, that already youthful target demo now skews even younger. Think of this YA spin-off as a close cousin of *The Goonies* or, to keep it in the Lucas family, *The Adventures of Young Indiana Jones*. A refreshing, family-friendly detour, the series follows four kids who accidentally blast off from their sheltered home world and find themselves in the wider galaxy. As you'd expect, the episodes are full of Spielbergian wonder and fizzy, caffeinated energy, and its young cast is relatable and engaging. But the real draw here is Jude Law as the morally ambiguous rogue Jod Na Nawood. *Skeleton Crew* is goosed along by its playful tone and looming sense of G-rated danger. It's a charming one-off that reminds us we were all kids once . . . and maybe in our hearts, we still are. It's a show that isn't embarrassed to have fun.

6. THE ACOLYTE

The growing roster of Disney+ Star Wars series are free to experiment and take interesting chances in a way that the big-screen blockbuster installments are not. They can mix in different genres and create something new. Take *The Mandalorian*, which is like *Star Wars* as a gunslinger western, and the YA-flavored *Skeleton Crew*. With *The Acolyte*, we get something like *Star Wars* crossed with a detective procedural, and it (mostly) works. The story follows Jedi Master Sol (Lee Jung-jae), a respected figure tasked with investigating a series of shocking crimes that may be connected to his former Padawan, Mae (Amandla Stenberg), who has taken a dark turn since she left his side. Set roughly a century before the Skywalker saga, *The Acolyte* is full of satisfying twists and lets its central mystery unfold slowly, which is effective . . . until it isn't.

7. THE BOOK OF BOBA FETT

When Temuera Morrison's Boba Fett made his long-awaited return to the screen in season 2 of *The Mandalorian*, fans finally got a canonical answer to the age-old question of whether the galaxy's most infamous bounty hunter had survived his encounter with the Sarlacc in *Return of the Jedi*. But it turns out an even pulpier version of Mando's adventures wasn't exactly what many viewers wanted of a Boba Fett–centric series. While *The Book of Boba Fett* ostensibly focuses on Fett's quest to take control of the Tatooine criminal underworld once ruled by Jabba the Hutt, the show's late-season inclusion of two episodes integral to the plot of *The Mandalorian*'s third season felt like a forced attempt to get the fandom on board with a spin-off that was otherwise proving to be a jumbled disappointment.

WHAT'S NEXT: THE STAR WARS UNIVERSE IS ABOUT TO GET EVEN BIGGER

BY ELIANA DOCKTERMAN

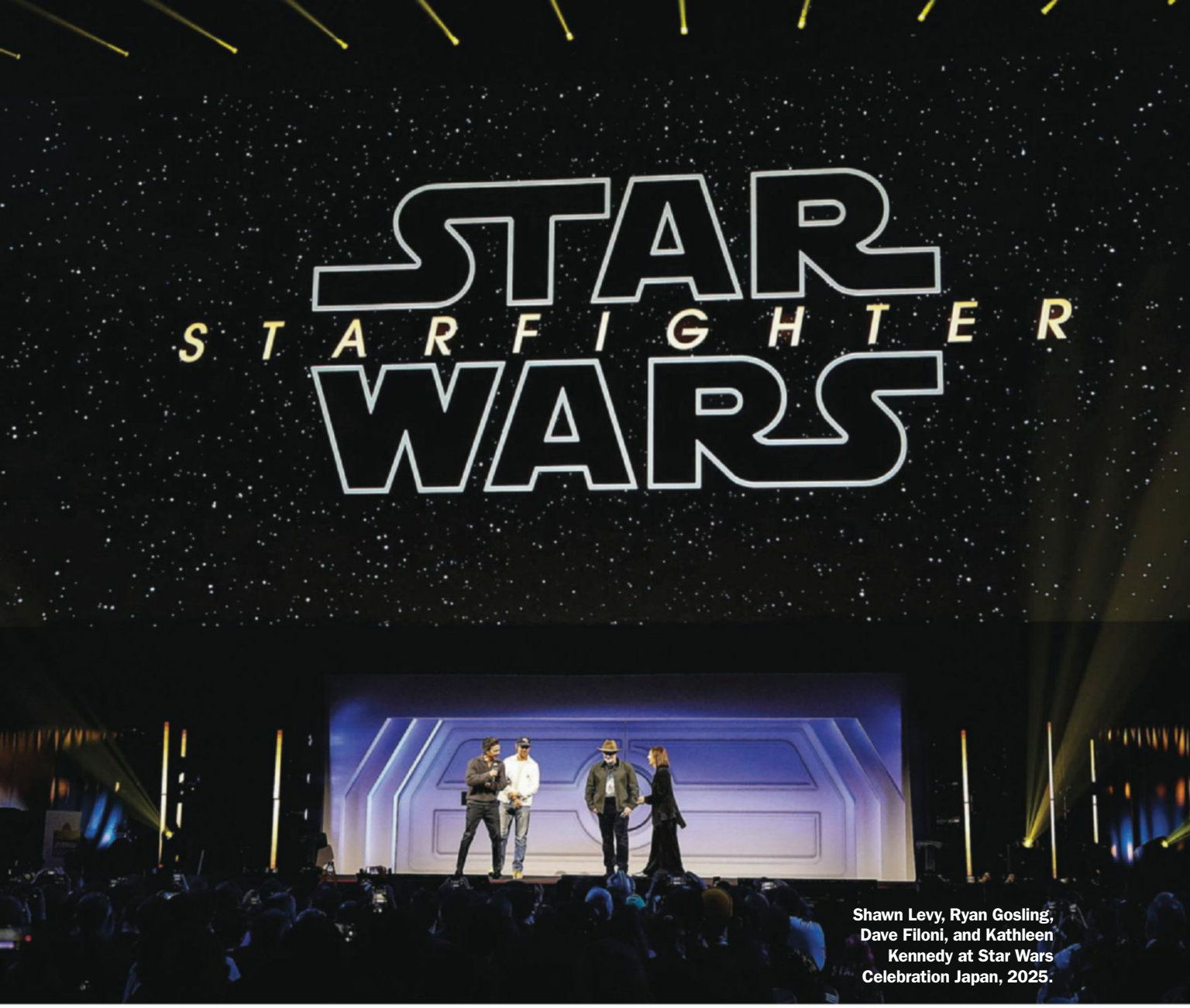
The Star Wars universe is a lot like ours in one important way: it's ever-expanding. Since purchasing Lucasfilm for $4 billion back in 2012, Disney has released six brand-new big-screen adventures. On top of that is all of the original Star Wars streaming shows that have populated the studio's streaming arm, Disney+. That's a lot to be grateful for. But right now, fans still have questions. Well, one big question really: What comes next for the Star Wars universe? Because right now, the picture is as cloudy as, well, Lando Calrissian's city in the sky.

To be clear, Disney has no plans to stop making movies for the mulitplex set in a galaxy far, far away. That said, the studio's more recent playbook of quickly cranking out prequels and spin-offs (like *Rogue One* and *Solo*) was retired following the disappointing box office returns of *Solo*. (It made $392.9 million globally, but that proved an unsatisfactory profit for a movie that, after a director shake-up and reshoots, reportedly cost almost $300 million to film.)

In the long hiatus between 2019's *The Rise of Skywalker* and 2026's *The Mandalorian and Grogu*, the Star Wars brain trust shifted its attention to its streaming division, which busily launched six new live-action series following the successful blast off of 2019's *The Mandalorian*: *The Book of Boba Fett*, *Obi-Wan Kenobi*, *Andor*, *Ahsoka*, *The Acolyte* and *Skeleton Crew*.

Thus far, the franchise has largely mined audiences' nostalgia for success. And that will continue to be the case when fans finally welcome the long-awaited sophomore season of *Ahsoka* before the end of 2026. A modest and underrated side-quel saga with a devoted following, *Ahsoka* has a lot of room to spread out in interesting directions in its second season. But perhaps the biggest and most immediate loose end that will need tying up is the season 1 cliff-hanger finale. Dave Filoni has reportedly written all of the new season's episodes himself, while *Game of Thrones*' Rory McCann has been tapped to step in for Ray Stevenson as Baylan Skoll. (Stevenson passed away shortly before season 1 aired in 2023.) As for star Rosario Dawson, she will be back, as will her costar Natasha Liu Bordizzo. And there will be another familiar, if unexpected, face: Hayden Christensen will swing by to provide a blast from the past as Anakin Skywalker.

When *Ahsoka* arrives, it will be hard on the heels of another recent Disney+ show, *Star Wars: Maul—Shadow Lord*. This new animated tale from the dark side gave the faithful a deeper look at the sinister, red-faced baddie of the title and his reign of terror. Further down on the small-screen development slate is the still-vague promise of a new Star Wars series from *Lost* co-showrunner Carlton Cuse. What's it about? Good luck finding out without the use of a Jedi mind trick.



Shawn Levy, Ryan Gosling, Dave Filoni, and Kathleen Kennedy at Star Wars Celebration Japan, 2025.

Over on the movie side, things are finally coming into focus. Needless to say, there's been a lot riding on *The Mandalorian and Grogu*. Mainly, the question of whether die-hards would still turn out to see a non-Skywalker movie in the theater. Would they be willing to pay for a babysitter to see two characters they can watch any time they want on their TVs while curled up on the sofa? With Din Djarin and Baby Yoda finally out in the world, Disney can now shift its focus back to some of the stalled, in-development Star Wars film projects that have been taxiing patiently. Will their current red lights now turn green—or at least blinking yellow?

While their fates hang in the balance, the biggest film project that we actually have intel on is *Star Wars: Starfighter*. *Deadpool & Wolverine*'s Shawn Levy has signed to direct the picture and Ryan Gosling, a newbie to the Star Wars-verse, will play the lead in a story that is said to take place five years after the events of *The Rise of Skywalker*. (Start consulting your universe timelines, stat!) Beyond that, the breadcrumb trail of clues goes cold. One thing's for certain, though, Disney has to be thanking its lucky stars that it snagged Gosling before the massive success of *Project Hail Mary* earlier this year. *Starfighter* is slated to hit theaters on May 28, 2027. And no, it's not too early to mark your calendars.

40 GREATEST MOMENTS: FROM YODA'S WISDOM TO VADER'S RAGE

No science fiction franchise has been more influential than Star Wars. (Sorry, Star Trek fans!) The space-opera saga created by George Lucas has delivered 1,212 minutes of intergalactic dogfights, dynastic drama, and quirky robots and aliens. Even non-fans are likely to immediately recognize iconic imagery like Darth Vader's helmet, the *Millennium Falcon* or Luke Skywalker's lightsaber. Which raises the question: Of the hundreds, maybe thousands, to choose from, which Star Wars moments are the best? That is to say, the most beloved, the most iconic, the most meme-worthy. It may be an unanswerable question, but that didn't stop TIME's entertainment team (and sundry Star Wars superfans) from trying to rank the top 40 scenes. This list is restricted to the original trilogy, the prequels, the sequels, *Rogue One* and *Solo*.

40. The trash compactor

A New Hope

This is the first time Leia, Luke, Han and Chewie work together. When they start exchanging barbs, you know they have something special. It's the perfect mix of terror and humor at which Star Wars excels. (The scene has one unanswered question: If the trash compactor compacts every few hours, how does the trash monster not get crushed?)

39. Yoda declares the start of the Clone Wars

Attack of the Clones

Sensing that the Jedi victory on Geonosis was really no victory at all, Yoda (voiced by Frank Oz) is quick to shut down the gratitude Obi-Wan Kenobi (Ewan McGregor) expresses for the arrival of the clones. "The shroud of the dark side has fallen, begun the Clone War has," Yoda muses as the scene pans to Chancellor Palpatine (Ian McDiarmid) overlooking the massing of an army, to the ominous strains of "The Imperial March." The scene effectively sets the stage for the furor to come.

38. Obi-Wan vs. Anakin on Mustafar

Revenge of the Sith

A key moment fans slogged through three prequels for: Anakin Skywalker (Hayden Christensen) breaking bad. And boy, does Lucas milk it. This may be the longest Star Wars fight scene ever, chock-full of risible dialogue. Most memorable, though, is Anakin's limbless body rolling around on the ground . . . before catching fire.

37. Republican liberty dies

Revenge of the Sith

Lucas's preoccupation with intergalactic governance is at times distracting and, as commentary on the George W. Bush era, a little on the nose. An observation by Padmé (Natalie Portman), "So this is how liberty dies—with thunderous applause," is one of the few truly great lines from the prequel trilogy.

36. "Use the Force, Luke"

A New Hope

Luke Skywalker (Mark Hamill) is flying in the Death Star's trenches when he gets a call from beyond: Obi-Wan tells him to turn off his targeting computer. Luke obliges, using the Force to guide his fighter's torpedoes, which set off a chain reaction, destroying the Empire's planet-killer. This wins the day—and shows that the Force is powerful far beyond mere parlor trickery.

35. Binary sunset

A New Hope

Early in *A New Hope*, Luke is pretty much just like any other teen—impatient, whiny and desperate to leave home. What sets him apart is illustrated in a powerful moment: Luke is taking in the Tatooine sunset, except there are two suns. Kansas? Not anymore.

34. "Chewie, we're home"

The Force Awakens

Star Wars fans have had to put up with many a disappointment over the years, from lackluster prequels to dubious spin-offs. Needless to say, there was a lot of anxiety about the series's return to the big screen with *The Force Awakens*. When Han Solo (Harrison Ford) and Chewbacca (Peter Mayhew) find their way back to the *Millennium Falcon* after years apart, Han, uttering these words, might as well have been speaking for the entire audience.

33. Yoda visits an exiled Luke

The Last Jedi

After Rey leaves Ahch-To, a frustrated Luke decides to burn down the first Jedi temple along with the ancient texts inside. It's then that Yoda shows up to remind his former apprentice of the ways of the Force. Yoda sends a bolt of lightning crashing into the Jedi temple to set it on fire on his own. Then, in typical Yoda-speak, he reminds Luke why a true understanding of the Force can't be gleaned from a bunch of old books.

32. Yoda teaches the younglings

Attack of the Clones

Before the prequels, we only got to see how Yoda taught the ways of the Force to the adult Luke. Here we get a fun look at what it's like to grow up in training to become a Jedi warrior. Turns out it's a lot like preschool, but with lightsabers.

31. The speeder bike chase

Return of the Jedi

Packed with seat-gripping first-person shots, Princess Leia (Carrie Fisher) and Luke's 310 mph pursuit of Imperial Scout troopers through the dense forest of Endor is one of the saga's most thrilling sequences.

30. Vader Force-chokes Motti

A New Hope

Admiral Motti attempts to give Vader a dressing-down over his belief in the power of the Force. Big misstep. Motti realizes it before he can even finish his tirade as Vader suffocates him from several feet away. "I find your lack of faith disturbing," Vader forebodingly croons as the Imperials cower.

29. Yoda battles Count Dooku

Attack of the Clones

Clones gives fans little to love. But it is the first movie in which Yoda is digitally animated. The CGI allows for this ridiculously fun (and flexy) lightsaber battle between the Jedi Master and Count Dooku (Christopher Lee).

28. Ewoks celebrate Rebel victory

Return of the Jedi

Although the Ewoks remain polarizing creatures among Star Wars fans, it's hard to deny that seeing the teddy-bear-esque warriors dance to the "Yub Nub" song in joyful celebration of the defeat of the Empire is amazingly adorable. Because it clearly is amazingly adorable.

27. Kylo Ren kills Han

The Force Awakens

The only person who saw this twist coming was Harrison Ford, who apparently wanted Han killed off way back in the original trilogy. It took major guts for director J.J. Abrams to ax one of the series's most iconic characters. But it gave an often playful movie emotional heft.

26. Luke's Tauntaun

The Empire Strikes Back

Han, a scrappy pirate, turns a corner when he risks his life save Luke from exposure on the ice world Hoth. Han keeps Luke warm by slicing open his Tauntaun and delivers this classic: "I thought they smelled bad on the outside."

25. Past Jedi help Rey

The Rise of Skywalker

In the climactic duel against the biggest villain of the saga, Chancellor Palpatine has Rey seemingly defeated. But a choir of Jedi past, including Obi-Wan Kenobi, Anakin Skywalker, Yoda and Mace Windu, among many others, join together to encourage Rey to rise and defeat the Sith Lord.

24. The Mos Eisley cantina

A New Hope

One of the biggest faults of the Star Wars saga arguably is that it focuses so m h on i human (and human-like) characters even while building a rich universe of bizarre aliens. Except, that is, for *A New Hope*'s classic cantina scene, which takes viewers on a whirlwind tour of Star Wars extraterrestrials. And that song is just so catchy!

23. Yoda fights Darth Sidious

Revenge of the Sith

The original trilogy denies fans the opportunity to see either of the (arguably) most powerful Jedi Masters wield a lightsaber. So naturally, the prequels could only culminate in a head-to-head battle. Yoda and Darth Sidious (Ian McDiarmid) engage in an acrobatic duel of wits, swordsmanship and Force wizardry that illustrates the stark differences between the light and dark sides.

22. Leia strangles Jabba

Return of the Jedi

Let's get this out of the way: Lucas's notorious decision to show Carrie Fisher chained up wearing a gold bikini was an unabashed grab at teenage boys' wallets. (Fisher was not a fan and reportedly warned *Force Awakens* star Daisy Ridley to refuse to wear any swimwear.) But oh, what eventual catharsis and sweet revenge—Leia strangles Jabba with the very chains he used to enslave her.

21. *Solo* solves the Kessel Run problem

Solo: A Star Wars Story

In *A New Hope*, Han Solo brags that his starship—the *Millennium Falcon*—is "the ship that made the Kessel Run in less than 12 parsecs." Over the years, the science-savvy have pointed out that a parsec is a unit of distance, not time. So Han's statement doesn't seem to make sense. In *Solo*, a young Han completes the Kessel Run in truly less than 12 parsecs: by finding a shortcut.

20. Kylo Ren throws a fit

The Force Awakens

No new villain was going to live up to Darth Vader. So why not make Kylo Ren a petulant baby? Casting Adam Driver (*Girls*) was a stroke of genius. Kylo's pulling out his lightsaber and destroying whatever is nearby proves that he is a worthy villain, if immature.

19. Vader's first breath

Revenge of the Sith

The moment Lucas's prequels were ultimately building toward: the transformation of a horribly maimed Anakin into the mechanical Vader. But the scene also underscores why Vader—consciousness separated from its physical form—has always been a singularly compelling portrayal of evil.

18. "Help me, Obi-Wan Kenobi. You're my only hope"

A New Hope

Leia, about to be captured by Darth Vader's Stormtroopers, sends an SOS to aging Jedi Master Obi-Wan Kenobi, who's living in hiding on the desert planet of Tatooine. The princess's plea has became a meme unto itself, uttered even by non-fans to appeal to potential saviors in times of crisis.

17. The Imperial March

The Empire Strikes Back

If *A New Hope* is about the triumph of good over evil, *Empire* is exactly the opposite. Nothing drives home the scale of the Empire like this scene, which shows the sheer number of Star Destroyers in the Imperial fleet. But what really makes this scene memorable is John Williams's "Imperial March," an instantly recognizable orchestral triumph that oozes pure evil.

16. BB-8's thumbs-up

The Force Awakens

Anyone can anthropomorphize an animal or an alien—give it big eyes, and everyone will love it! Star Wars managed to do it with machines. BB-8 became the breakout star of *The Force Awakens* as soon as he decides to help out Finn (John Boyega) in his mission to woo Rey (Daisy Ridley). The thumbs-up (via butane-like lighter on an extendable arm) BB-8 gives Finn seals his fate as most adorable droid.

15. Han flies in to save the day

A New Hope

Just when it seems as though Luke is about to be shot down by Vader and his squadron of TIE fighters before he can destroy the Death Star, Han shows up in the *Millennium Falcon* to help. This moment is made more epic by Han's earlier declaration that he was only helping the Rebels for the reward: it shows how far the cynical smuggler has come.

14. The Battle of Hoth

The Empire Strikes Back

The problem with putting all your strategic eggs in one basket, any military commander will tell you, is that that basket becomes a prime target for an enemy assault. So learn the Rebels on Hoth when the Imperial fleet dispatches a phalanx of mighty AT-AT walkers to neutralize their base. The Battle of Hoth gives us a classic Star Wars scene: the Rebels figuring out they can jerry-rig their fighters to tie up the walkers with cabling, sending them plummeting into the snow in disastrous fashion.

13. Rey summons Luke's lightsaber with the Force

The Force Awakens

Kylo Ren reaches his hand out for the lightsaber in the snow. It quivers. And then it flies past Kylo and into the hands of Rey. Sure, much of *The Force Awakens* plays like *A New Hope* redux, with Rey as a stand-in for Luke, but for every little girl who was told growing up that she couldn't play Jedi because "girls don't get lightsabers," seeing a woman wield the famed weapon is the ultimate moment of vindication. Some of those girls, now grown up, may have teared up a bit in the theater.

12. Vader rescues Luke from the Emperor

Return of the Jedi

The story of Anakin Skywalker—the central character in the Star Wars saga—finally comes full circle as Vader tosses the Emperor down the reactor shaft of the Death Star, proving there is, in fact, still good in him. Vader's decision to kill his master in order to save his son is one of sacrifice, as the Force lightning that surges through his body when he picks up the Emperor ultimately kills him. It's also one of redemption, allowing him to become one with the Force at the moment of his death.

11. Admiral Ackbar yells, "It's a trap!"

Return of the Jedi

Was there a more GIF-able line filmed in the pre-GIF era? Admiral Ackbar (voiced by Erik Bauersfeld) figures out that the Rebels have entered an ambush during the Battle of Endor. Although the exclamation has been a favorite of nerds for decades (and is oft used by Star Wars obsessive Stephen Colbert), it flourishes in the internet age, when prank-reaction memes are in demand.

10. Vader unmasked

Return of the Jedi

Why is Vader considered one of the most compelling villains ever? It's at least in part due to his utterly terrifying mask, which keeps the "real" Vader hidden. So it was all the more powerful when, with Vader drawing his last breaths, Luke removes the Sith Lord's mask, revealing the face of a remorseful and disfigured old man.

9. Luke and Vader's first lightsaber duel

The Empire Strikes Back

Even without the iconic reveal that Vader is Luke's father, the Sith Lord's first battle with his newly trained son is one for the history books. This high-stakes showdown between good and evil is the perfect culmination of the events leading up to it. Not to mention that the actual fighting is a vast improvement on the choreography of the only lightsaber duel that precedes it—the rheumatic, anti-climactic clash between Obi-Wan and Vader in *A New Hope*.

8. Obi-Wan mind-tricks the Stormtroopers

A New Hope

Obi-Wan's seemingly effortless ability to convince Stormtroopers on Mos Eisley not only that they don't need to see Luke's identification but that R2-D2 (Kenny Baker) and C-3PO (Anthony Daniels) aren't the droids to whom Leia entrusted the Death Star plans serves as Luke's memorable introduction to the ways of the Force. It also provides one of the franchise's most repeated—and parodied—lines: "These aren't the droids you're looking for."

7. "May the Force be with you"

Every episode

Arguably the most famous Star Wars phrase, the saying is more or less a blessing and a "Good luck." Pay close attention to who uses it: it's always the good guys. And its use can be evidence of character development, as it is the first time the notoriously Force-skeptical Han utters it to Luke on his way to the Battle of Yavin in *A New Hope*.

6. Yoda schools Luke in the ways of the Force

The Empire Strikes Back

"Do. Or do not. There is no try," Yoda famously instructs Luke while training him on Dagobah—a maxim that strips away the mystique and complexity of the Force to reveal the Zen principle at the core. Luke responds by making a half-hearted attempt to lift his X-wing out of the swamp, prompting Yoda to execute an impressive display of Jedi prowess.

5. The opening crawl

Every episode

When the first *Star Wars* was released in 1977, contemporary movies simply didn't open like this. So audiences knew they were in for something different when the words STAR WARS blazed across the screen, with the full might of John Williams's best orchestral work behind them. (The text effect is an homage to the *Flash Gordon* reels of the 1940s.) The words that followed—"It is a period of civil war . . ."—both grounded viewers in this new universe and became iconic in their own right, establishing a practice followed by every subsequent movie save *Rogue One*.

4. Yoda lifts Luke's X-wing

The Empire Strikes Back

Until this moment, the power of the Force seems muted: it can summon small objects, it can be used to deceive the weak-minded and it can even help a torpedo find its way. But when Yoda uses it to lift the massive X-wing starfighter, we finally recognize just how awesome the Force truly is.

3. Vader's ruthless massacre

Rogue One

The first true demonstration of the extent of Vader's power doesn't come until the closing sequence of *Rogue One*. As a group of Rebel soldiers attempt to evade pursuing Imperial forces, Vader finds his way on board their ship. The merciless slaughter that ensues gives credence to his standing as the most feared monster in the galaxy.

2. Leia and Han saying "I love you." "I know."

The Empire Strikes Back

Playing Han, Ford reportedly improvised this quip. As Han is lowered into the carbonite mold at the end of *Empire*, Leia lets out a desperate "I love you." The script had Han responding generically, but Ford thought Solo would be cockier. The exchange perfectly captures the character—always bursting the dramatic bubble. Not to mention the dynamic between the two lovebirds. It is one of the sweetest moments ever filmed.

1. Darth Vader reveals Luke's lineage

The Empire Strikes Back

Widely considered to be one of the greatest twists in cinematic history, the moment Vader reveals his true identity to Luke has become synonymous with the allure of the Star Wars saga. After Luke abandons his Jedi training to rescue his friends on Cloud City—despite warnings from both Yoda and the ghost of Obi-Wan—he ends up locked in a duel with the Sith Lord. The scene culminates in both the loss of Luke's right hand and what is arguably the most famous movie quote of all time: "No, I am your father."

QUIZ: HOW WELL KNOW STAR WARS, DO YOU?

BY COURTNEY MIFSUD INTREGLIA

TRUE or FALSE?

1. The actor who voiced Yoda also voiced *The Muppet Show*'s Miss Piggy.

2. President Obama ended a press conference to watch a Star Wars flick.

3. George Lucas refused to include friends or family members in the cast.

4. Real garbage was used in *A New Hope*'s trash-compactor scene.

5. Mace Windu wielded a purple light-saber to represent the balance between the light and dark sides of the Force.

6. Peter Cushing, who played Grand Moff Tarkin in *A New Hope*, wore slippers during many of his scenes.

7. You can exchange Star Wars coins as legal currency.

8. David Lynch was asked to direct *Return of the Jedi*.

9. The costume department borrowed some duds from *Dr. Who*.

10. Every non-English language spoken in Star Wars is fictional.

11. A regular cast member played more than one character.

12. Chewbacca was inspired by Bigfoot.

1. TRUE: Frank Oz, the renowned voice performer and actor, lent his voice to the Muppet, as well as to other *Sesame Street* favorites, like Cookie Monster and Bert.

2. TRUE: The 44th president ended his final press conference of 2015 by telling reporters he had to get to a screening of *The Force Awakens*. First Lady Michelle Obama was hosting a movie viewing in the White House for service members and their families.

3. FALSE: From portraying Twi'lek dancers to senators, Lucas's three adopted children make 10 cameos in the prequel trilogy. Jett, the youngest, plays a Padawan in the Jedi Academy who tries to fend off clone troopers in *Revenge of the Sith*.

4. TRUE: The garbage used in the scene smelled so bad that Mark Hamill burst a blood vessel in his face trying to hold his breath. The cameramen had to adjust to keep his injury out of the shot.

5. FALSE: Before filming the Geonosis arena battle in *Attack of the Clones*, Samuel L. Jackson (Mace Windu) voiced concerns about being visible in the crowded brawl. Lucas broke from the Jedi colors, blue and green, and gave the Jedi Master his unique blade.

6. TRUE: The actor found his costume boots so uncomfortable that he slipped them off when his feet were not on camera. The slippers are on display in England's Whitstable Museum and Gallery.

7. TRUE: But you might not want to. The small South Pacific nation of Niue, which is associated with nearby New Zealand, mints coins with Star Wars characters on one side and Queen Elizabeth II on the other. While you could buy your lunch with a silver $5 Darth Vader coin, the retail value of the coin can cost you $200 or more.

8. TRUE: Lucas offered the job to the *Eraserhead* director, but Lynch turned him down, saying he never really liked science fiction. Immediately afterward, Lynch directed *Dune*, a sci-fi film that mingles several other genres.

9. TRUE: *The Empire Strikes Back*'s Trandoshan bounty hunter Bossk donned a yellow jumpsuit first worn by a character in the Dr. Who serial *The Tenth Planet* in 1966. But the costume wasn't unique to that series. The jumpsuit is a high-altitude Windak pressure suit, worn by the British Royal Air Force in the 1960s.

10. FALSE: In *Return of the Jedi*, Nien Nunb, Lando Calrissian's alien copilot during the second Death Star attack, utters a phrase in Kikuyu, a Kenyan language, that translates to "What are you doing over there? All of you, please come here."

11. TRUE: Kenny Baker, the actor inside R2-D2, also played Paploo, an Ewok in *Return of the Jedi*. You can spot Paploo stealing a speeder bike to distract Scout troopers from the Rebel assault.

12. FALSE: Han Solo's Wookiee copilot was inspired by George Lucas's dog Indiana. Lucas owned the Alaskan malamute at the time of writing *A New Hope*, and the dog's constant presence inspired Lucas to give Solo a big furry sidekick.

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STAR WARS

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ABOUT THE COVER ARTIST

Brian Rood is known for his extensive work on the Star Wars franchise, including fine-art reproductions, Blu-ray box art and illustrated storybooks for Disney Lucasfilm Press. "When I was approached about doing this cover," says Rood, "I was excited to portray both the original 1977 Luke and the 2017 version of Rey from *The Last Jedi* in the same piece. I hope it pays tribute to this special franchise."

Credits

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THE MANDALORIAN'S NEW MISSION 50 Nicola Goode/Lucasfilm Ltd. **52-53** (from left) Francois Duhamel/Lucasfilm Ltd.; Nicola Goode/Lucasfilm Ltd. **54-55** (clockwise from left) Lucasfilm Ltd.(2) Nicola Goode/Lucasfilm Ltd. **56-57** Lucasfilm Ltd. **58-59** (from left) Lucasfilm Ltd. (2) **60** Francois Duhamel/Lucasfilm Ltd. **61** (from top) Lucasfilm Ltd.; Francois Duhamel/Lucasfilm Ltd.

SMALL SCREEN 80 Des Willie/Lucasfilm Ltd **82-83** (clockwise from top left) Melinda Sue Gordon/Lucasfilm Ltd.; Matt Kennedy/Lucasfilm Ltd.; Lucasfilm Ltd **84-85** Lucasfilm Ltd. (3)

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WHAT'S NEXT 87 Christopher Jue/Getty Images

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QUIZ 94 Album/Alamy

MASTHEAD 95 Courtesy of Brian Rood

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"Is it cool or embarrassing to own a life-size R2-D2? It's cool, right? Right?!"

—MEGAN FOX

"Ugh, God, you're both wrong. Han didn't shoot first, because Greedo never fired off a shot in the first place. Han shot, Greedo died, end of story. Greedo was too busy mouthing off while Han just sat there."

—ARIANA GRANDE

"You either love *Star Wars* or you just haven't seen it."

—ED SHEERAN

"My friend and producer David Puttnam said, 'Let's go and see this film that's playing at the Chinese. I feel it may be quite interesting. It's by a guy called George Lucas.' We went in, and the theater was absolutely shuddering with expectation, and I thought, 'This is what film ought to be.'"

—RIDLEY SCOTT

"For the first 10 years of my career, I didn't write scripts." I wrote Star Wars jokes."

—KEVIN SMITH

"I can mark out my life . . . in terms of my relationship with that film."

—SIMON PEGG

"I saw it in Spanish—Darth Vader was speaking Spanish and all that. Then at school, I didn't play as Darth Vader or Luke Skywalker, I played spaceships. I was a spaceship. That's what I wanted to be."

—JAVIER BARDEM

"I was a big Star Wars fan as a kid, and I dressed up like Princess Leia [on *30 Rock*]. To get out of jury duty I would dress up like Princess Leia."

—TINA FEY

Audiences first met Luke Skywalker in 1977, here on Tatooine. Half a century later, he is still at the center of it all.